THE CHILDREN OF THE NILE

MARMADUKE PICKTHALL

THE CHILDREN OF THE NILE

THE CHILDREN OF THE NILE

BY MARMADUKE PICKTHALL

AUTHOR OF "SAÏD THE FISHERMAN," ETC.

"Where there is no vision the people perish."
Proverbs of Solomon.

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1908

Copyright, 1908, in the United States of America

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC AND TURKISH WORDS

Abdu=*a slave, a servant;* much used with an epithet of the Deity in the formation of proper names—Abdullah, Abdul, Aâl, etc.

Abû=*father of.* Among the fellahîn of Egypt, however, it often signifies *son of,* being used for abahû (his father). Thus Abu Khalîl may mean either "the father of Khalîl" or "his father (is or was) Khalîl."

Abû Farrâg=*Father of Consolation.* One of the epithets of the Sayyid Ahmed el-Bedawi, the national saint of Egypt, in whom some see no other than the god Osiris.

Abû Nowwâs=a famous jester at the Court of Harûn er-Rashîd, whose name has become a byword for roguery.

Abû Zeyd=a hero of Arab story.

Afrît=a species of *jinni.*

Antar=the Arabian Hercules.

Arnaût=*an Albanian.*

Bimbashi (Turk.)=(lit., chief of a thousand) *a major* in the army.

Caïmmacâm=(lit., lieutenant) *a lieutenant-colonel.*

Casr en-Nîl=(lit., the Palace of the Nile) barracks, once a palace, on the bank of the Nile at Cairo.

Copt=a native Christian inhabitant of Egypt, descendant of those who, at the Arab conquest, declined to embrace El Islâm.

Darabûkkeh=a little drum played with the fingers.

Dîn=*religion,* especially El Islâm; much used in the formation of proper names, as Shems ud-dîn, 'Ala'd-dîn.

Dôseh (the) = (lit., trampling). A ceremony long since abolished in Egypt, but still practised in other provinces of the Moslem world; in which a number of devotees lie down close together in a row, while some reverend sheykh rides on horseback over their bodies.

Dumyât = *Damietta.*

Eblîs = *Satan.*

Efendi (Turk.) = *lord, master;* gentleman.

Efendim (Turk.) = *my lord* (equivalent in common talk to *monsieur*. The *m* is the Turkish pronominal suffix (= my), not a plural, as some writers have supposed.

Efendîna (Turk. word and Ar. poss. suffix) = (lit., our lord) *the Khedive.*

El Azhar = the university mosque of Cairo.

El Câhireh = *The Victorious* (italice Cairo).
El Mahrûseh = *The Guarded.*
} Names of Cairo.

El Cuds = *Jerusalem.*

El Islâm = the Mohammedan religion.

El Islâmîyeh = the whole region of El Islâm (*cf.* Christendom). This is the Muslim's "country," the so-called countries, Egypt, Syria, and so on, being regarded as mere provinces.

Emîr = *Prince;* an hereditary and purely Arab dignity. It belongs of right to all the kindred of the Prophet, in addition to the title Sayyid (lord) and the epithet Sherîf (= noble).

'emmeh = the period of separation imposed by Muslim law upon every widow and divorced woman.

Er-Rashîd = *Rosetta.*

Fâtiha (the) = the opening chapter of the Corân, recited to confirm oaths, cement friendship, and on all solemn occasions.

Fellâh (pl. fellahîn) = a churl, a husbandman.

Frank (Ar. farangi) = a native of Western Europe.

Gabarti = a Muslim native of Abyssinia (from the town of Jabârt (Zeylah), which the Cairenes, who have no letter j, pronounce Gabârt).

Gamûseh = a milch buffalo.

Gann ibn Gann = a mythical king, or dynasty of kings, over the jânn (genis), to whom, among other mighty works, the building of the Pyramids is popularly ascribed.

Gehâd (for jehâd)=*a holy war—i.e.*, war waged against the heathen or infidels; and otherwise, with the authority of the Successor of the Prophet counselled by the Learned in Religion. The term is applied by Christians to the Crusades.

Gehennum=*Hell.*

Ghafîr (pl. ghufara)=a local guardian of the peace.

Ginni (for jinni, pl. jânn)=an intelligent being, not unlike a man, living underground and preferring night to day for his avocations. He is generally mischievous and hostile to mankind, though he shares with man the chance of salvation. Few have ever met with a good ginni, though it is known that such exist. Their real home, however, is the Mt. Caucasus, which, according to tradition, surrounds this world like a wall.

Gisr=*a dyke*, a bank against the inundation of the Nile, always used in Egypt for a road or footpath.

Hâg=*a pilgrim*, one who has been to Mekka or Jerusalem.

Hâg Gohha (Ar. Hâj Johha)=a famous half-mythical buffoon. Why he should bear the reverend title of a pilgrim I have not been able to find out, nor have I heard that title given to him elsewhere than in Lower Egypt.

Hashîsh=*bhang, or Indian hemp*, a powerful drug, served up in a variety of forms from a smoke to a conserve, to the use of which many people in Egypt, chiefly of the lower orders, are addicted. It is also in repute as an aphrodisiac.

Hashshâsh=a slave to the above habit.

In sh' Allah=(lit., "if God wills") *I hope.*

Iskenderîyeh=*Alexandria.*

Istanbûl=*Constantinople.*

Kâfir=*infidel.*

Kafr=*village.*

Khamsîn (pl. Khamâsîn)=a hot wind which blows at the end of March and in April. The plural, Khamâsîn, is proper to the season of such winds.

Khatîb=*a village preacher* and schoolmaster.

Khawâga=a title, originally of respect, given exclusively to unbelievers.

Khedîwi=*the Khedive* (the Turkish *v* always becoming *w* in Arabic, and *vice versâ*).

Kisweh=*a covering*, a suit of clothes ; especially the covering, generally rich of material and embroidery, which covers the cenotaph in the mausoleum of a saint.

Kôm=the mound composed of the débris of generations of mud buildings, on which most of the towns and villages of Egypt are raised above the level of the fields. In the case of towns like Tanta and Damanhûr, the mound is of great height, and has dignity in a distant view, especially when, as is the case at Tanta, it is crowned by a fine mosque.

Libdeh=(lit., a piece of felt) a tall cylindrical cap of brown felt worn by the ghufara, or village watchmen.

Macâmât=evening assemblies of men for pleasurable conversation, generally at the house of a great man or one renowned for learning or wide travels. The Macâmât of El Harîri, a series of exquisitely written anecdotes concerning the wily and facetious Abu Zeyd, purporting to have been told at such gatherings, have made the term classical in Arabic literature.

Mamûr=a local governor under the provincial mudîr. He has direct control over the omdehs in his district, which is called a merkez.

Ma sh' Allah=("What God wills !") an exclamation of surprise used specifically to avert the evil eye when expressing admiration of any living creature.

Masr=*Egypt ; Cairo.*

Masri (pl. Masrîyîn)=*an inhabitant of Egypt.*

Meydân = *a parade-ground*, an open space in a city, a square.

Mihrâb=the niche which marks the kibleh in a mosque ; an oratory.

Môlid=(lit., birth ; Môlid en-Nebi=the Prophet's Birthday, hence any celebration resembling the Môlid en-Nebi, which is accompanied by a fair and much rejoicing) *a pilgrimage and fair in honour of a saint.*

Mudîr=a provincial governor appointed by the Khedive.

Mudirîyeh=the province governed by a mudîr.

Mufettish=*an inquisitor, an inspector* (to Arab ears rather the former).

Mulâzim=*a lieutenant* in the army.

Muslim (pl. -în)=*a Mohammedan.*

Mustahàll=one who facilitates remarriage of a wife divorced. A man who has divorced his wife, which is done by word of mouth and very easily, can only regain her after she has been duly married and divorced by someone else. The person chosen for this service is usually one whose age or known infirmities are sure to render the consummation of his marriage (which is obligatory) purely technical. He is called a *mustahàll.*

Nabbût=*a quarterstaff.*

Nôrag=a kind of harrow used by the fellahîn when threshing corn.

Nûri (pl. Nawar)=*a gipsy, a vagabond.*

Omdeh=(lit., *prop, support—i.e.*, of the State) *headman of a village.*

Ombashi (Turk.)=(lit., chief of ten) *a corporal,* a non-commissioned officer.

Râs et-Tîn=(the Cape of Figs) the headland at Alexandria on which the native quarter is built, having the Khedive's summer palace at its extremity.

Rîf=(lit., fertile country) the cultivated plain of Egypt as opposed to the desert ridge called gebel (mountain), which the fellahîn still regard as perilous and full of robbers, and the sohra (anglice Sahara), or enchanted ground, which lies beyond.

Riyâl=*a dollar.*

Saccà=(one who gives to drink) *a water-seller.*

Sayyid=(lord) a title of high honour given to all prophets and a good many saints, and also to descendants of the Apostle of God.

Shâmi=*a Syrian;* in practice almost always a Christian of that country, its Muslim inhabitants being regarded as compatriots by their Egyptian co-religionists, far more than are the Copts, the native Christians. In these lands religion is everything, and nationality, as we understand it, does not exist.

Sheykh=*an old man*, hence, *a leader* in anything, a reverend person, *a saint.*

Sheykh of the Arabs (Sheykh el 'Arab)=the Sayyid Ahmed el-Bedawi, the national saint of Egypt, whose tomb is at Tanta.

Shîsheh=*a water-pipe* or hubble-bubble *with a glass vessel.*

Tar=*cymbals.*

Tarbûsh=a scarlet headcap, *a fez.*

Tell=*a mound—e.g.*, Tell-el-Kebîr (the Great Mound).

Ulema=*The Learned* (*i.e.*, in religion) doctors in jurisprudence, which here is bound up with theology.

Wakîl=*a steward*, an agent, a manager.

Wallah, Wallahi=*by Allah*, a common affirmative.

Ya=*O* (vocative)—*e.g.*, y' Allah !—ya Muslimîn !

Yuzbashi (Turk.)=(lit., chief of a hundred) *captain in the army.*

Zaghârît (sing. Zaghrateh)=shrill fluttering sounds peculiar to Eastern women performed by rapid revolution of the tongue in the mouth. The classical form of the word is Zalâghît (sing. Zalghateh).

Zikr=a quasi-religious observance consisting in the repeated ejaculation of the name of Allah, or other sacred words, by a number of persons in concert, with bows and strange contortions of the body.

Zakîr=a performer in the above.

THE CHILDREN OF THE NILE

CHAPTER I

Two mats, some faded cushions, and a few vessels of brass and pottery on the floor in a corner, composed the furniture of the room where Mabrûk Efendi, student in the School of Medicine, sat reading in a printed book. It was a large room, and the walls had once been grandly decorated, but most of the paint had scaled off long ago. The cool winter air entered freely through the tracery of a fine but damaged lattice, together with a merry din—scream of pipes, clash of cymbals, rub-dub-dub of many little drums—from a circumcision-feast in progress at the house next door. Mabrûk, as a neighbour, had been bidden to the feast, but had declined the invitation in all courtesy, proposing that afternoon, by Allah's leave, to journey to his native village in the Delta, whither a puzzling letter from his father called him. But, for the time being, he had forgotten everything. Cross-legged upon a mat, his fez thrust back as far as it would go by the frequent passage of a hand up his brow, he

was holding the page very close to his eyes, which pursued the sense with a visible greediness.

The book was an Arabic translation of a French romance, and Mabrûk was reading it for the fifth or sixth time. It told how the valiant and polite Sharlas, a passionate and noble Frank, ran mad for love of a virgin of transcendent beauty, the exquisite and refined Kamîl. The least unpleasant odour would have caused her serious illness; the slightest taint of boorishness in her adorer would have killed Kamîl. But Sharlas was a censer of the costliest perfumes; he observed urbanity in all approaches to his dear, even when, having compassed her abduction, he faced her in a lonely house at midnight. His suit was urged in terms of so seductive an elegance that she often swooned with the effort which resistance cost her; nevertheless, she withstood every outburst of his devouring flame, until at last, reduced to helpless tears, he kissed her feet and begged for life itself. Then, when she felt secure of the enviable position of an only wife, and not till then, did that clever one relent and grant him heavenly joys.

"What a girl!" the student moaned, hugging himself in intensity of admiration. "By Allah Most High, this virgin knew her business!"

While he sat thus entranced, his wife, with a baby in her arms, entered the room. She was shrouded in black from head to foot, only a pair of mischievous dark eyes, made languid by free use of kohl, appearing above the white mouth-veil. As Mabrûk did not look up, she crossed

over to the lattice and peeped out, drumming on the woodwork to attract his notice

"What is it, O Zeynab?" he asked at length.

"O beloved, surely it is time to start. I am ready, and Muhammad the water-carrier waits below with a porter for the baggage."

"Then go with him. He has the money for the tickets. I myself await three friends, who have promised to escort me to the station."

He turned from her with impatience and resumed his book.

But the commotion which ensued in the lodging, the entrance of Muhammad and the porter he had brought up with him, their hoarse blessings, and the shrieks of Zeynab directing them, effectually prevented further reading. When all was still again, he also felt that it was time to start, and bestirred himself accordingly, intending to leave word for his friends with the keeper of the outer door. But even as he stood instructing an old Nubian, whose delight in the music made him hard of hearing, his friends arrived, and they set off together.

"What sayest thou of the news?" cried one of them, when greetings seemed exhausted.

"By Allah, I have been indoors all day. I have heard nothing save the music of my neighbour's feast. What news is there?"

"Well, thou knowest how three Beys of the greatest of the soldiers—their names Ali Fahmi, Abdul Aâl Hilmi, and Ahmed Arâbi — took umbrage at the recent order that no one should in future be promoted from the ranks, regarding

it as wronging the children of the country in the interests of Turks and Circassians; how they wrote to the Council of Ministers demanding the rescission of the edict, the resignation of Osman Basha the Circassian and the appointment of some one of the sons of the Arabs to succeed him as Minister of War; how they were summoned to Casr-en-Nîl and there imprisoned. Well, this morning Arâbi's regiment marched in arms to Casr-en-Nîl. They broke into the room where the court-martial was sitting; they smashed all the glass and furniture; the Minister of War fled through the window; Aflatûn Basha died on the spot."

"Allah have mercy on him!"

"Nay, the latest rumour states that he was only wounded."

"Wounded or killed, the affair is truly serious. The mob carried the three officers back with shouting to Abdîn, where in the square before the palace they were joined by two more regiments, and all now wait there, threatening harm to Efendîna unless their wishes are at once made law. I myself spent an hour amid the crowd of lookers-on. A fine show, O my dear, but disgraceful in our civilized land."

"The Council of Ministers has been long closeted with His Highness, but the result of their deliberations is not yet known. The quarrel concerns the soldiers only. It is not our business. But if soldiers are to go about the streets armed and in a state of madness, there is an end of safety for poor, righteous men."

"Well, Allah have mercy on those three officers. They are sure to be shot or beheaded, if not impaled."

At that Mabrûk raised hands and eyes in horror, crying:

"No, no; Allah forbid! The age of barbarism is past. They will be imprisoned for life, it may be, or else banished."

Thus conversing, the group of students traversed two shady markets and came out into a sunlit thoroughfare where crowds of people pushed a slow way up or down, dodging carriages, donkeys, laden mules and camels whose drivers bawled incessantly. Here one of the party hailed an empty carriage. Mabrûk, with two others, got inside, while the fourth man clambered up beside the driver, who immediately whipped up his horses with loud warnings to the crowd.

"It is said that the Prince Mahmûd, driving in his carriage, met the rioters and asked them what they were doing. For answer, they bade him alight and find out for himself."

Mabrûk groaned.

"I ask pardon of Allah! The affair is grave indeed. What wild beasts thus to answer a polite inquiry!"

"In truth, they are quite uncivilized," replied his neighbour, and was preparing to enlarge upon the theme, when he who sat up by the driver faced round suddenly, crying:

"Look! In the name of Allah, look in front of you!"

All sprang up in the carriage, holding on to one another.

A regiment under arms, marching at ease to the beat of the drum, was advancing briskly with glad cries. The carriage drew up to one side while they swung by, some singing madly, others shouting, "Live, Efendîna! Live, Arâbi!" with monotonous insistence, as hawkers cry chickpease or water-melons.

"What is the sense of it?" Mabrûk inquired of a saccà who offered water to the occupants of the carriage.

The man smiled widely, showing all his teeth. His hands, and the cups in them, flew up despairingly.

"Ya sîdi, Allah knows! It is one of the regiments returning from Abdîn. They are quite mad, the poor ones! But it is said that Efendîna pardons the three officers, and dismisses from his counsels Osman Basha whom they insulted. If that is so, then God have mercy on us, for we have no government."

"But why do they shout Arâbi and not Abdul Aâl or Ali Fahmi? Who is this Ahmed Arâbi to be thus preferred?"

The water-seller gave another shrug.

"Heed them not, O Excellency. They know not what they cry. Ahmed Arâbi is one of God's creatures, a Bey like another."

"By permission, O my masters," put in the driver of the carriage, turned right round on his box by interest in the conversation, "Ahmed Bey Arâbi is well known to me—a good, righteous

man if ever was one, and kind to the poor. Moreover, he is very highly connected, having espoused the sister by milk of the secluded one of Efendîna himself—he, the son of a fellâh. So all look up to him. Osman Basha wronged him years ago, which makes his work to-day mere retribution."

The speaker turned with that, and waved his whip. The carriage moved again.

"By Allah, it is true as the professor states; this Ahmed Arâbi is a noble man. May he triumph over all his enemies!" said one of the students, with a careless laugh.

"Nay, by thy leave, O loved one, he ought verily to have been punished. The soldiers will be encouraged by such leniency to rebel for every flea-bite. Indeed, is not this day's business the outcome of that mutiny two years ago which Ismaîl inspired against the Frank commissioners? The father sowed, the son reaps. There will soon be no peace in the land, nor any safety for poor righteous men."

They were now in the modern quarter of the city, to which wide streets and featureless blocks of building gave a civilized air. Some of the passing carriages contained fair European ladies, one of whom Mabrûk saw bow to a Frank on the footway, who bared his head as she passed. Recalled to Sharlas and Kamîl by this little incident, he was deaf for a time to the discussion raging among his friends. At length he heard:

"It is a shame for Mabrûk to be leaving us at a time of such excitement In sh' Allah, he will return to-morrow. Knowest thou, O Mabrûk,

that there are brigands where thou goest? All kinds of barbarities are daily practised there. It is a region totally inelegant, most disagreeable for a man like thee."

Mabrûk Efendi scouted the idea of brigands as too fantastic in a civilized country, but vowed to return to the city as soon as might be; and while he yet spoke, they reached the railway-station. Muhammad the water-carrier, who had sat on the doorstep waiting their arrival, came forward at once and gave Mabrûk his ticket, with the information that the train was ready. The friends were walking through on to the platform, when an official shrieked, "Make haste!" Mabrûk curtailed farewells and took to his heels. Jumping in as the train began to move, he found himself in a compartment full of well-to-do fellahîn, who kindly made room for him. Most of them wore a shawl snooding the turbaned head to protect it from the winter air which fathers toothache.

"Salvation be upon you!" he said, as a matter of course.

To his surprise the salutation went unanswered, eliciting nothing but cold looks, till one old man, pitying his disconcertion, observed, "Salvation be upon believers!"

Shocked to learn from this that they took him for an infidel, Mabrûk made haste to witness; whereat their faces told of some amazement, and one or two of them murmured, "Allah is great!"

The fashion of a Frankish suit beneath the fez, though growing frequent in the town among young Muslims of advanced ideas, in the provinces

was still restricted to rich Copts and Syrians. Mabrûk's own civilization of the last few months had caused him to underestimate the barbarism which still reigned outside the city.

To avoid their gaze, which troubled him, he looked out of the window, and saw the suburbs of the town slip by and the cultivated plain appear, stretching away to a line of low hills, the colour of a lion's back, the desert frontier. Sakiehs and clumps of palm-trees, with here and there a cake of mud-built hovels, stood forth like islands. The fields were full of life: men and women ploughing or reaping green clover; children herding grey, unwieldy buffaloes, brown sheep, or munching camels. Along the dyke moved a scarce intermitted procession of country-people, of camels, oxen, mules, but chiefly asses, in clouds of dust made warm by the declining sun. Shocked by the inelegance of the rustic scene, Mabrûk Efendi tried to read; but Sharlas and Kamîl appeared receding like the city; they grew small and indistinct, and the talk of his fellow-travellers came in between.

One of these—a youth, squatting up in the corner seat—had produced reed-pipes from his bosom, and was playing on them dreamily. The others were eagerly discussing the news of the day, deploring the indulgence shown to the three officers as likely to increase the insolence of the soldiery, and so menace the prosperity of the land. This led to comparing of notes on the price of cotton-seed, of grains and other produce, to complaints of the tax-gatherer, and thence, by

a natural sequence of ideas, to mention of a wild brigand, one Muhammad en-Nûri, who, with a band of bold confederates, had for two months past spread terror in the district they were now approaching. He was said to have attacked whole villages by night with guns, and, driving forth the inhabitants, plundered the houses.

At that Mabrûk could not contain himself.

"It is a sin!" he exclaimed, "a disgrace to this land of Masr, the most civilized of all lands from the beginning, as is plain from the study of history. It is a duty for every man to assist the Government to catch and destroy this most hateful offender, that so our people may have rest, and advance in the paths of urbanity and elegance." And with enthusiasm he foretold a day when every man in Egypt would be as refined as was the noble Sharlas.

Those fellahîn listened at first in silence, admiring words they understood not. They smiled one to another, remarking, "He speaks nicely." But when the sense of what he said occurred to them, there were murmurs of dissent and shrugs and chuckles.

"Urbanity!" cried one. "Ya Salâm! Urbanity is of the town, and we be countrymen. As for this Muhammad, this Nûri, if the rulers catch him, let them punish, since it is their function. What is it to us? The Government knows its business, we know ours. Doubtless thou hast suffered personally at the hands of this robber, which makes thee angry; it is natural."

"Nay, I speak as for the public good."

"That, O beloved, is not our business. That belongs to Allah. The public good is no man's benefit. Let each attend to his own. . . . Ah, urbanity and elegance are fine things, no doubt; but for my part, I would rather see the taxes done away with."

The farmers laughed, applauding the justice of these sentiments, and Mabrûk Efendi laughed with them, feeling sociable. By the time the train stopped at his destination he had quite forgotten he wore Frankish dress. It therefore shocked him when his father, the Sheykh Mustafa, cried: "Is this my son?" provoking laughter in the crowd upon the platform, and a group of women from the village surrounding Zeynab made further rude remarks on his appearance. Smarting from such criticism, he felt a scarecrow when, mounted on an ass beside his father's mule, he headed a procession through the little country town. But self-consciousness, with every other sensation, was destroyed in him when presently his father spoke.

"O my son, thou hast not yet asked why I sent for thee. The reason is a grave one—nothing less than danger to our house. By the death of my lord the Basha—may Allah have mercy on him!—I have lost my patron and most kind supporter; and my enemies wax bold, seeing me without protection. They seek my ruin and set snares for me; they charge me with ambition in the matter of thy schooling. They carry tales of my wealth, and excite the avarice of the rulers. They would depose me from being omdeh.

Already my land, which formerly paid little by the grace of Allah, has been reassessed at thrice its value, and I have cause to fear more cruel measures. In demonstration of my wealth they point to the manner of thy schooling, asking why, when I entered thee at El Azhar, I did not throw thee on the mercy of Allah like a poor man's son; and why, since then, at the School of Medicine, I gave thee the appurtenances of a youth of station. I have thought on compromise, for Allah knows it grieves my soul to break thy grand career. But my mind sees no alternative. If I withdrew thy allowance and made of thee a poor student, they would hear of it only as a tale, and think it false. I would not write all this by the hand of the public scribe, so simply bade thee come. But now I say, return no more to the School while things are so; be a fellâh like thy brother, and may Allah reward thee! Thy return to till the land alone may persuade men I have lost my money."

Mabrûk, though weeping, made submissive answer, and the little company, having scaled a steep embankment, entered on a high, long bridge across the Nile, where hoof-beats rang out noisily. On the further shore he saw through tears the village and its palm-trees haloed in blue twilight. Far below, on the brink of the great river red with sunset, men crouched at their ablutions for the evening prayer. Where was now Kamîl, where Sharlas?

At the bridge-end a group of villagers waited to give them greeting. The women raised their

zaghârît, the men cried welcome. Among the latter was one tall and powerful, a stranger to Mabrûk. The Sheykh Mustafa presented him with marked deference.

"My son, the Sheykh Muhammad en-Nûri, who honours our village." He added beneath his breath: "The famous robber."

CHAPTER II

"Fine, Frankish clothes, three outer garments, a complete suit; also a shirt of flannel—soiled, in truth, but thou canst wash it; also three collars and a kind of fancy halter for the neck. Feel the material, O my dear, how nice! And the workmanship, how excellent—a very triumph of the needle and the loom!"

The father of Mabrûk, taking seat on the edge of the shop, laid out each article of apparel before the merchant squatting within, who, for his part, seemed to give no heed whatever, sucking hard at his shîsheh so that the water in the vessel kept purring like a cat that is pleased.

Mabrûk himself, the young fellâh, stood by with others of the village to watch the bargaining. In the week which had elapsed since his homecoming, urbanity, no longer his business, had assumed its true proportion as a mere accomplishment—an apish trick or antic of the brain, only valuable as giving him among his present associates a vogue like that of the juggler or skilled story-teller. He saw the relics of his civilization spread out for sale with no other sentiment than a hope to profit by the transaction.

So large a gathering before a shop was rare in the bazaars of the mud-built country town. It caught attention; merchants left their wares, women broke off their purchasings, to learn the matter.

"Those belong to the infidels," shrilled one old hag, stretching out a scraggy arm towards the garments.

"To the infidels, sayest thou, O girl! Ask pardon of Allah! It is a sin for thee to speak so. The best and noblest of the Muslimîn in cities wear them," rejoined the Sheykh Mustafa, smoothing the clothes out lovingly. "Look at the buttons, I beseech you; what a number! The buttons here alone are worth much money."

By this the group of onlookers had become a crowd. Beggars, who always hie where there is concourse, began to whine upon its outskirts. A vender of salted nuts cried his wares as at a festival.

"Thou didst buy these at the shop of Mitri the Greek, at the entrance to the Mûski," said the merchant, looking suddenly at Mabrûk.

"Wallahi, that is a lie. It was from Nasr the Syrian, higher up on the same side, a better place. . . ."

But ere the youth could finish his protestation, his father leapt up in anger and assailed him.

"Be silent, son of a dog! Curse thy religion! Thou hast spoilt everything. What knowest thou of this raiment? Hast thou no sense, no subtlety? Why, why didst thou speak, why answer him?"

The vehemence of this aside gave the crowd

keen delight. The merchant was forgotten for a moment. He leaned forward and overhauled the clothes.

"I give a riyâl for the lot," he said contemptuously.

The father of Mabrûk was at him in an instant.

"Say that again, O shameless! I make Allah my wakîl! O Lord of the Worlds, just hear what this man offers—one riyâl for things worth five at least!"

"Five riyâls! Never! I trust in Allah; I am a Muslim," rejoined the merchant, with dignity; nor could all the arguments of Mabrûk, his father, and their faction among the bystanders, induce him to increase his bid by one para. He returned to his shîsheh with enjoyment, and the more they shouted the more did he seem to lose all consciousness of their existence. Things were at this hopeless pass when a fellâh, tall and stalwart beyond the common, forced his way through the press and inquired of the matter.

"Listen, O Muhammad, O Nûri!" screamed the father of Mabrûk. "This merchant, whom I called my friend, will give but one riyâl for all that lies here between us."

He spread out his hands to illustrate the enormity of the extortion, then drew them slowly down his face, as men do who have made their prayer to God.

The robber appeared both shocked and grieved. He eyed the merchant reproachfully, fingering his beard; while the spectators whispered in awe of his great name.

"He has the effrontery to ask five riyâls for these things," protested the merchant, plainly discomfited. But since he is thy friend—behold! I give him four riyâls, which is all I have with me. Think not that the clothes are worth so much. It is a present I make to my soul's dear one, the Sheykh Muhammad en-Nûri; may his life be prolonged!"

Having seen the payment made, the crowd dispersed, a little scandalized at so abrupt an ending. Most of the fellahîn returned at once towards the village. But Muhammad detained Mabrûk, and, hand in hand, they strolled between mud-walls to the bank of the Nile. There, in the shade of an old mimosa-tree, they crossed their legs, and watched a flock of white-winged barques glide southward, brooding on their soft reflections.

"What hast thou decided?" asked the robber presently.

From their first meeting at the bridge-end Muhammad had conceived an admiration for Mabrûk, gaping at the entertainment of his outlandish culture and the elegant phrases he could turn at will. More than once he had urged the youth to join him at his business, an affair of waitings which Mabrûk's drollery would help to beguile.

But Mabrûk still hesitated. Consorting with the bold, he felt drawn to boldness, from a habit of blindly accepting what was set before him; but by nature he was kind and debonair, and held cold-blooded violence in horror.

"I cannot," he replied now with a shudder.

"Thou fearest? Why? There is no ground for fear. It is our business to inspire fear, not to be afraid. If a company of armed men failed to flinch at our appearance, then, by Allah, we might tremble somewhat. But that is scarce conceivable. Moreover, I have high protections, O my soul. Those above me have their secret hatreds, and Muhammad is a dagger up their sleeve. Didst mark a soldier stop me in the town just now? It was to say that there is work for me to-night, and for thee, too, in sh' Allah! Could I find another companion? Yea, in truth. But thy converse has made vain the talk of others."

"But the vengeance, the loud outcry in the villages!" groaned Mabrûk.

"There is no vengeance where there is no killing, and I have not killed a man these many months. As for the villagers, if they hear or see aught of it, they say: 'It is the Children of the Night; it is the Robbers from the Mountain.'"

Therewith, seeing the youth still trembled, Muhammad told the story of his life, to reassure him.

He was no gipsy; the name of Nûri had been given to him in jest, to signify a rogue, a roving man. His father, a Gabarti from Abyssinia, had married a woman of the Fayyûm, and settled down in the city there as a shoemaker. When Muhammad was ten years old, the family had left that land of palms and reedy streams and groaning water-wheels, and come northward into the Delta, to the town of Damanhûr, where the boy

soon took to wild courses. He organized a band of young marauders, who, beginning with mere pranks—such as transferring goats in the night from yard to housetop or emptying vessels of corn to fill them with frogs or scorpions, deeds long imputed to the ginn—grew at length so bold as to attack people. In this way Muhammad discovered that he was manly above the common; and one day, after a beating from his father, he resolved to make a trade of manliness. Armed with a curious pistol and two daggers which he had taken from his father's house, he set out to seek adventures. For years he wandered on from place to place, till he had seen the whole of Egypt from Dumyât to Minieh; and wherever he appeared the wild youth of town and village flocked to him as their natural leader. More than once he had been captured by the slaves of power, and once at Mansûreh had been sent to prison for five years. But in the first month he escaped and resumed his way.

At length, in the neighbourhood of Shebîn-el-Kôm, he was stricken with love for a girl who gave him to drink from her pitcher when he was weary; and, having obtained her at the price of all his savings, had settled down in her father's service as a husbandman. But, his great name for manliness causing him to be sought out of all who had a secret grievance, he succumbed presently to a large bribe, and helped a notable of the province to a desired inheritance. After that he had fallen back upon his old way of life, and moved, with his wife and child, to Tanta, whence,

on a friendly hint from the authorities, he had come three months ago to Mabrûk's native village.

Mabrûk was listening with but half an ear, his mind still troubled with the bold proposal.

A series of shrill whistles and the rumble of a train upon the bridge reminded them that the day grew old. They rose of one accord.

"Say yes, O my soul!" coaxed Muhammad. "I ask no help of thee, but only conversation. Accompany me to the Mountain after sunset."

CHAPTER III

Outside the town, across the river from Mabrûk's village, was a patch of broken waste-land, in its features resembling a congregation of large rubbish-heaps, said by some to be the remains of a former city. By day those tawny mounds amid green fields seemed a bit of desert stranded in the very heart of the rîf; by night they were a home of dread enchantment, the haunt of jackals, and, some said, of ghouls—a place where doleful voices wandered bodiless. The paths among them ran through little gorges, the rubble forming cliffs some ten feet high; so that for fifty yards the nervous traveller was cut off from the comfort of the settled country, and found himself alone in savage wilds. Men of the town whose business took them out among the villages, if forced to return after dusk, either made a round to avoid the gruesome spot, or braved its terrors only in large companies with song and noisy jest. It was named, in all the country round, the Mountain.

Thither Mabrûk and the robber bent their steps when the evening call to prayer was being chanted from the minaret of the town. The crescent moon appeared amid the fading glow of sunset

like an emerald sewn in the hem of a rosy veil. Along the high embankment of the railway lights shone out, making the plain beyond all mystery. Near the foot of this embankment the robber told his friend to wait a minute, and strode back towards the houses. In a little while he re-appeared with a donkey saddled and bridled. "There may be stuff to carry," he explained, and bade Mabrûk get on behind him. Beneath the double load, the donkey scrambled bravely up the slope, across the line, and down on the other side. Here they dismounted, and Muhammad made shift to hobble the beast with a piece of rope. As he arose from doing so, a watchman in a little hut beside the rails wished him a happy night. "Keep an eye on my donkey, of thy kindness, O Derwîsh!" replied the robber, setting off into the Mountain, whose miniature crags looked ghostly in faint moonlight with green sky behind them.

In the midst of the wild, one huge block towered among the mounds. Muhammad went up to this mass and, dislodging a boulder with his knee, revealed an opening, into which he crawled, bidding Mabrûk follow. It was more than the youth had bargained for, but he obeyed; and upon Muhammad striking a match and lighting a lantern he had brought with him, he was relieved to find himself in an ordinary room. Here were ashes in the middle of the floor, and, heaped up in a corner, clothes and divers weapons. The brigand chose out two enormous daggers, which Mabrûk discovered, when they were put into his

hands, were made of wood, and, for himself, assumed a monstrous scimitar. Next, picking a piece of charcoal out of the ashes on the floor, he drew lines on Mabrûk's face, holding the lantern up the while so as to mark the effect. He proceeded to treat his own face in like manner, prolonging each eyebrow upwards across the temple, and giving the eyes a sinister slant. Ugly wrinkles now came out upon his brow, and the corners of his mouth were stretched in a fixed grin of devilish malice. Through all the adventure hitherto Mabrûk had moved in awe of his own fearlessness, but, confronted with that frightful ginni, his teeth chattered.

Going out again, he found the night all terrible. The stars were pitiless; rays from the setting moon, threading the ruins, raised up horrid shadows.

"Fear not, O my soul!" said Muhammad kindly. "In sh' Allah, there is no danger. The only danger I can apprehend is from an action of the chief Government overruling the provincial, and of that I should get warning. Ah, that were a danger indeed, for now that Efendîna has gone to school to the Franks, as thou sayest, the chief Government lacks generosity."

Clutching at a topic so remote from present fears, Mabrûk bewailed the fallen state of Egypt, as they sat together on their heels beside a path which ran close by the massive ruin. The Franks, foul usurers, had persuaded the Khedive Ismaîl to contract huge debts—his slaves until they had him in their toils, and then his creditors.

To-day the whole wealth of Egypt was in the control of the Franks. The son of Ismaîl was helpless in their hands; he could obtain no money save through their commissioners.

"They are devils, curse their religion!" interjected Muhammad, with an admiring chuckle.

Yet there were good men among them. Mabrûk himself had had for professors His Excellency the Mûssiû Dibûn, a Frenchman, and His Excellency the Mister Bawwil, an Englishman—urbane men both of them, who had loved Mabrûk, and taught him all they knew.

"Ah, how they loved me! Very often they would invite me to their house, to sit on a chair, and eat with them from the same dish; and all the titbits of the meal they thrust into my mouth for honour."

"Now, Allah forgive thee that, my dear. It was defilement. The Franks eat pig, it is known, and love the taste of hairless, crawling things. Wallahi, thou didst sin!"

"Nay, nay; these ate as Muslimîn from politeness towards me," Mabrûk explained; and he was going on to tell of other glories when the brigand clutched his arm and whispered:

"Hark!"

At the word his former abject fear returned upon him. At first he could only hear a jackal howling, but presently his strained ears caught a sound of singing in the distance. The sound grew nearer rapidly, and he could hear long "Ah's!" of delight in pauses of the song. At length a swinging light appeared above a ridge

and the song grew louder suddenly. Forms of men on foot and on the backs of donkeys moved in faint outline against the sky.

"Be still — keep silent!" snarled the robber angrily, though Mabrûk was not aware that he had made a noise.

The shapes were lost to sight as the path dipped into a hollow, but the light danced onward innocently towards the ambuscade, vanishing for a space, then reappearing, by reason of inequalities in the track and of its winding in and out among the mounds. The words of the song were now distinctly heard. They were in praise of night's discreetness and the veiled charms of the beloved.

In a trance of horror Mabrûk watched those guileless ones draw near, foreseeing all that would occur with cruel vividness. He witnessed the shock of surprise; he heard heartrending shrieks, loud groans, and prayers for mercy; he saw bleeding corpses, and in horror of the ghastly scene he wailed aloud.

"Curse thy religion!" cried Muhammad, springing up.

The travellers, still a stone's-throw off, had halted in alarm. Each rider strove to turn his donkey's head and at the same time keep close to a neighbour. In the crush the lantern fell to the ground and was extinguished. But this confusion lasted but an instant. Before Muhammad arrived on the scene the donkeys were careering madly back along the way they had come, urged by loud thwacking of sticks and the yells of their

terrified owners. The pedestrians had scattered in all directions.

The robber turned upon the shamed Mabrûk with mind to beat him, but only cursed him roundly, and dragged him back to the hiding-place. In the secret chamber once again he lit the candle, and rubbed the charcoal marks from both their faces, grumbling at first, then laughing as he came to think on it more calmly.

"Wallahi," he observed, "that wail of thine would stand us in good stead among the tombs, couldst thou but hold it in a minute longer! No matter; thou art new to such work, and I have had much pleasure in thy conversation. Thou hast seen and done strange things for one so young. But surely it was wrong for thee to eat with infidels. I fear me thou hast swallowed pig at unawares. By the Prophet, I should not have been so bold! I should have feared to risk so great defilement."

"No, by Allah!" Mabrûk protested, throwing off dejection. "Have I not said they loved me? The food was Muslim food, and cooked—ah, I assure thee!—it was cooked to a nicety."

Conversing in this pleasant strain, they left the secret den, and came to the place where they had left the donkey. It was nowhere to be seen.

"O Derwîsh!" the robber shouted; "where is my donkey?"

The form of the watchman appeared in the lighted doorway of his little house.

"Is it not with thee?" he called down to them. "Men whom I took for thy companions came and

fetched it a while since. It is, perhaps, stolen. May Allah comfort thee in thy bereavement."

At that Muhammad moaned as one distraught:

"Woe on him! He was borrowed, and I am not rich enough to pay his price. My friend, who trusted me, will think I stole him. He will count me an abuser of good faith, a thief, a malefactor! O Allah, hide my shame! O Lord, assist me!" Burying his face in his hands, he indulged his grief a while. "But say, what manner of men were they who took him? In sh' Allah, I may know them, and requite their wickedness."

"Ten tall men, armed to the teeth, every one of them blind of both eyes, and deaf of both ears, and lame of both feet. Do I know?" replied the watchman, with a chuckle.

"Curse thy father and thy mother! Where is my donkey?" cried Muhammad, springing towards that wicked joker.

"The world is wide, O my sweet, and there be two sides to the iron road."

Derwîsh retired into his hut, and barred the door. They could hear him laughing merrily within. In a few bounds the robber scaled the embankment, crossed the metals glistening in the starlight, and found his donkey on the other side.

"Dearly shalt thou rue this trick of thine, O Derwîsh, O accursed!" he shouted towards the hut ere, laughing with Mabrûk, he started homeward.

CHAPTER IV

Before sunrise next morning Mabrûk performed his ablutions in the brink of the river, and afterwards said his prayers upon the sandy beach. Opening his eyes after the last prostration, he beheld his father a stone's-throw off, likewise concluding the act of worship. The Nile and its coasts wore a whiteness as of lilies in the vague dawn, a flush just beginning to lancinate the pallor, like that intermittent and capricious fire which wantons in the heart of certain gems. In the distance, where the wide flood coiled out of sight, a graceful minaret rose from among some trees on the further bank. Wrapped in their cloaks, with shawls around their heads, the father and son drew near and blessed each other.

The Sheykh Mustafa laid a hand on Mabrûk's arm, and, with a careful glance along the shore, said earnestly:

"Consort no more with this Muhammad, this Nûri. He is a Muslim, and a good man personally. But a good staff is bad in the hand of an enemy." With that, squatting down upon his heels, he proceeded to expound his meaning.

There had always been a hostile faction in the village, headed by the Sheykh Mahrûs Abd-en-Neby, who had been omdeh in the old days, before the Sheykh Mustafa, by his cleverness in marrying the foster-sister of a Pasha, secured the headship for himself. Now that the Pasha was dead, this faction, formerly insignificant, had grown alarmingly in strength and daring. He (Mustafa) had even feared for his life not long ago, when two disguised ruffians, who were certainly Mahrûs's sons, had attacked his brother, a very aged man, and left him by the road for dead. By the mercy of Allah the old man had been preserved on that occasion, and had lived to die a natural death a month later. Since Muhammad en-Nûri had come, that fear was past. The wicked dared not molest the omdeh, seeing such a hero at his beck and call. Yet Muhammad himself was the servant of their ends, to throw discredit on the omdeh's work, and get him punished as abetting crime. And when once he was cast down from being omdeh, the sons of Mahrûs would straightway butcher him. To slay an omdeh was a grave offence, sure to make a stir in the land; not so the killing of the Sheykh Mustafa, a fellâh like another. Mahrûs, as omdeh, would have power to hush things up. Twice lately had Mahrûs and his sons made complaint to the authorities, and each complaint had brought a reprimand to the Sheykh Mustafa. Already men addressed him "O Sheykh," and looked straight in his eyes, who had formerly hailed him "Excellency" and "Beatitude" with

eyes veiled and hands reverently hidden. It was clear that the rulers of the province, covetous of his wealth, and Mahrûs, who wished to oust him from the headship, had joined together to decree his downfall; and the weapon chosen to effect their purpose was no other than the well-known malefactor, Muhammad en-Nûri.

The robber had been confided to him by the mamûr, his official superior. But the charge had been given verbally, without witnesses; so that the mamûr, and those above him, could always deny it. Meanwhile, the noise of the robber's deeds went on increasing. Ere long it was sure to rouse the ire of the chief Government, and then who would suffer, who be punished? Who but the omdeh of the village he was known to inhabit? The omdeh alone was responsible in the eyes of the Government. It would fare ill with him anyhow in that day, yet how much worse if his favourite son were known for the robber's henchman!

Mabrûk stared hard at the river gliding smoothly away between sandy beaches at the foot of steep brown banks which felt the sunrise. At his back, along the gisr, up against the sky, went the procession of early wayfarers—family groups escorting some ox or camel, or, it might be, a few lank sheep; women and girls gliding proudly, holding burdens on their heads; each group, each figure, followed by a rosy cloud. He heard cries of the river-birds, voices of human kind; and yet, while conscious of all this, he beheld more clearly the charcoaled face

of Muhammad, the scene among the rubbish-heaps, and heard the ghastly whisper of the night. Surely he had been possessed with a devil. His boldness would be the ruin of his father's house. Hearing his father's tale, he hated boldness, and saw the beauty of a peaceful subtlety. With penitent tears he confessed the whole extent of his wickedness, but rather to his disconcertion the old man took it coolly.

"Praise to Allah!" he said. "Thou hast not robbed, and I have still one protector under the Highest—His Excellency Saïd Bey Ramadân, a great one of the house of Efendîna. He did me a kindness in the days of Ismaîl, for which I have paid him tribute ever since. He was always a lover of poor, righteous men. In sh' Allah, he will defend us from the wicked."

With that he declared it was time to go to work. Both rose and together climbed the high, steep bank, from the ridge of which the village was seen close at hand.

Raised above the surrounding plain upon a mound composed of the detritus of former villages, from which it grew as the cactus grows from its own dead leaves, it was still somewhat below the level of the Nile embankment, whence a path led down to it. From a distance it seemed surrounded by a wall of sun-baked mud, and, but for several palm-trees rising out of the midst of it, might have passed for one low building roofed unevenly. Only on a close approach openings were discernible—narrow alleys which a stout man brushed with both his elbows, leading in

and out among the low mud buildings, foul with offal and alive with dogs.

Already the inhabitants were trickling forth—little groups of men and cattle and small children journeying to their work upon the plain. Mabrûk's elder brother Rashîd emerged from among the hovels, teasing his sister, a child of eight, who was leading a big milch-buffalo out to pasture. At sight of his father and brother, he let the little girl go on, and joined them.

The fruit of an older wife who had not the honour to be foster-sister to a Pasha, he was of a darker complexion than Mabrûk and of a blunter manner, atoning for his confessed stupidity and lack of polish by the broadest good nature. He was the peacemaker in all village quarrels, calling on the disputants to bless the Prophet, and compelling them to recite the Fatha hand in hand. He envied no man, having no pretensions, no wish to overreach or distance anybody. Men and women blessed him as he passed; children fought for the rapture of holding his big strong hand. Even old Sheykh Mahrûs, his father's enemy, held Rashîd in warm affection.

Screening his eyes from the amber rays now scouring the plain and staining the village with its crest of palms, Rashîd looked at his father, then at Mabrûk, and, smiling, asked the cause of their dejection.

"Now by my life, thou art wrong to be so distrustful!" he exclaimed, when told of it. "Muhammad is upright and honourable, if ever man was. O my father, be not the lord of the

bag of gold, who goes in evident terror, publishing his apprehension. Let the great ones despoil us! And afterwards? Are we not Muslimîn, and is not our wealth in the mercy of Allah?"

The old man shook his head, and smiled sadly.

"Thou art brave, O my son; and the brave are always foolish. It may be that Muhammad en-Nûri is a simpleton on thy likeness. My fear is not of him, but of those who sent him. Them I fear greatly; I seek refuge in Allah. Mabrûk shall write this evening to His Excellency Saïd Bey Ramadân entreating him to use his influence to defeat those wicked ones. In sh' Allah, he will befriend me!"

But Mabrûk was struck by the justice of his brother's arguments, just as he had been struck by that of his father's a few minutes earlier. Gladly, as a bird hops from twig to twig, his soul sprang from doubt to trust, from shade to sunlight. The old man's terrors were, of course, unfounded.

Zeynab brought the midday meal to him where he worked, and they ate it together in the shade of the dome of Selîm the Donkey-driver, the village saint, which stood on the edge of the burying-ground, overlooking a field of green wheat. She complained to him of the rudeness of the village women, who were always mocking her refinement and the notions she had brought back from the town. To be unveiled in the sight of men had shocked her modesty at first returning. She missed the din, the tempting shops, the merry sights, the romps with other women at the bath.

Here was nothing but rough work all day, and at night, when she was tired and longed to sleep, the shrieks of trains upon the iron road disturbed her.

Mabrûk, as he watched her young maternal figure glide homeward along the bank between two fields, felt it indeed a sin for her to show her charms, and longed, he also, for the refinements of the city. He returned to his ploughing with a sigh. There seemed no short path to wealth in all the world except that trodden by Muhammad en-Nûri.

The people of the village, women as well as men, met together in the evenings to discuss the news and settle differences which had arisen during the day. In summer the scene of these informal councils was generally the common dust-heap or a threshing-floor, in winter the guest-room of the Sheykh Mustafa. But in the present winter the house of the Sheykh Mahrûs had gradually superseded that of the omdeh, as its lord outshone him in the public eye. The omdeh himself repaired thither after the sunset prayer, loving to converse with his rival as men love bargaining. The lifelong enmity of these two old men expressed itself in terms of the profoundest tenderness. At meeting they embraced and blessed each other; compliments formed the staple of their conversation, and if some slight divergence of opinion had perforce to be marked, the utterance was prefaced by, "In thy permission, O my soul," "Allah forgive me if I err," or "I submit to thy understanding, O my eyes." In

the minds of both, to quarrel with a known enemy had been youthful folly ill-becoming their grey hairs.

When Mabrûk reached the house of Sheykh Mahrûs on the evening in question, the rivals were listening with deep interest to a tale which the robber was telling. They sat side by side in the place of honour, hand in hand, and glanced at one another in ingenuous awe at points in the story. The room was full to overflowing, but place was found on the divan for the son of the omdeh. The rough door stood open, and in the doorway, as on the floor of the room, sat women, children, and the poorer men, all with heads wrapped up against the chill night air.

They were a gentle, smiling race, subject to anger just as children are, not without guile, but before all things sociable, whose fathers had tilled the soil of the Delta from the days of Noah. Envy, the ruling passion in prosperity, and father of all hideous crime, was here confined to the families of Mahrûs and Mustafa, who alone had wealth. The burden of taxation, made unjust by the extortions of provincial officials, weighed on all alike. All kinds of petty oppression made them brothers. They shrugged: "The world is so!" and confided their cause to Allah; seeing the great ones of the earth as rogues appointed to vex poor righteous men upon the road to heaven, in the same way that brigands are raised up on purpose to distress the pilgrim to the City of Light. At their ease upon the floor they interrupted the narrator, and joined in the conversa-

tion without ceremony. An oil-lamp of a Frankish pattern, hanging from a hook in the roof, threw light on faces.

"Didst thou complete the letter?" asked the Sheykh Mustafa, with a mien of importance, bending towards his son.

"Praise to Allah!" was the reply.

"A letter, Ma sh' Allah! To what purpose?" inquired the Sheykh Mahrûs.

"It is a letter long owing from me to His Beatitude Saïd Bey Ramadân, my kind friend and protector. May Allah preserve him to me, for he loves me dearly!"

"All men love thee, by Allah!" cried Mahrûs fervently; but his face was of one who bites a stone at unawares.

The robber, his story finished, came to sit beside Mabrûk.

"Wallahi, thou art a comrade, none like thee, for merry tales and conversation," he laughed. "But why, why didst thou scream aloud and scare the quarry?"

To Mabrûk's relief, Rashîd and other brave ones took his part. One said:

"Manliness is thy business, O Muhammad. Thou canst not feel with him who tries it for the first time. Who would not be afraid alone by night with an old ghoul like thee? Thou shouldst have let him try by daylight in a large company."

"O Lord, forgive them! Alas for the temerity of youth," sighed old Hâfiz, the blind khatîb, who overheard them. He proceeded to quote a

text from the Corân and five traditions of the Prophet against such doings. But no one heeded.

"Daylight or dark, it is all one to me," laughed Muhammad. "To-morrow, then, an hour before sunset, at the edge of the palm-wood by Kafr Zeyn. What say you?"

"Good, good! Agreed," cried several voices. "Mabrûk will feel no fear by day with all of us."

This sympathy, where he had looked for scorn, was grateful to Mabrûk. Nevertheless, his soul shrank from a second ordeal. Many times that night and on the following day did he swear that no power on earth should drag him to the palm-wood by Kafr Zeyn; and it was with a floating resolve not to find himself there that he strolled across the fields in that direction when the heat of the sun was spent.

CHAPTER V

The pigeon-village of Kafr Zeyn lay close to one of the greatest of those raised banks or dykes, against the overflowing of the Nile, which are the roads of Egypt. The place itself was hidden in fruit-trees with the exception of the dovecotes —round towers of mud some fifty feet high, narrowing towards the top and full of holes, round which the fair birds fluttered and cooed eternally. A grove of fine palm-trees plumed the ground to northward; and at its distant end, beside the road, was a clump of high, strong reeds, a pond in autumn. Here the robbers changed their faces by free use of charcoal, or covered them in shawls so as to hide all save the eyes, and, that done, kept watch upon the dyke, peering out through the canes. Groups of the fellahîn kept passing up against the sunset blaze, raising a cloud of dust which seemed on fire as it rolled along the dim edge of the palm-wood to where, from out a purple cloud of foliage, rose the pigeon-towers of Kafr Zeyn.

The impatience of the youths to be at work was sternly controlled by Muhammad, whose eyes, scanning the gisr, read each form that

moved on it intelligently, as it had been a word in plain text.

"Is the book with thee?" he said to Mabrûk. "In the name of Allah, read a little and keep them quiet till the time arrives."

"Aye, read to us, O sage!" cried the others eagerly.

Mabrûk produced from his bosom a well-thumbed pamphlet, and, sitting cross-legged with his back against a stout cane, he read of the loves of Sharlas and Kamîl, while his hearers sighed and moaned and hugged themselves in rapture at the spell of unknown words.

"Hist!" said Muhammad suddenly, causing the world to swim before the reader's eyes.

The golden evening, the cooing of innumerable doves in the adjacent grove, the neighbourhood of a crowded highway, above all, the act of reading to an attentive audience, had calmed the currents of his blood and held fear off from him. Only now, when Muhammad and the rest sprang up, did the boldness of the undertaking flash on him. To assail men thus by daylight, in a public place, seemed more than human bravery.

Pausing to replace the book in the bosom of his robe, he was hindmost when, at a word from their leader, the brigands dashed out from among the canes. Already Muhammad and the foremost were on the top of the bank; wild figures struck about with divers weapons, looming larger than life amid the dust-cloud up against the setting sun. Mabrûk sped after them, dreading to be left behind.

A company of merchants, set with their merchandise upon the backs of asses, had dismounted at the first alarm, and now lay shrieking for mercy with foreheads pressed in the dust of the highway. Only one of the party—a young Syrian in Frankish clothes—expostulated. This man fought desperately with two who tried to hold him; and though beaten with a nabbût and threatened with a slash from a huge scimitar, kept vowing vengeance on his assailants.

Other wayfarers made a detour to avoid the clear calamity, and left the dyke, hurrying by across the field or through the edge of the grove with terrified gestures and hasty ejaculations of praise to God. No one responded to the Syrian's cries for help. A woman screamed: "Shame on you, O people! O Muslimîn, by the Most High, it is a sin you are committing." But the man with her seized her fiercely by the arm and, muttering curses, dragged her past the painful scene. For Mabrûk the dust, like clouds of incense, the hue of fire on all things, made the deed a frenzy. He was searching the clothes of a prostrate merchant, enjoying his moans, when some one shouted his name. He looked up. The Syrian had escaped from his captors, and with hands straight out before him was running blindly towards the patch of cane. Mabrûk dashed to intercept him; but on the edge of the bank he stumbled on a tuft of thistles, and pitched headlong down upon his man. The two rolled together to the foot of the slope, biting, scratching, struggling, in a cloud of dust. The

Syrian had his fingers in Mabrûk's mouth, striving to tear the cheek. Mabrûk tried to bite off those fingers, and did all in his power to press the life out of his antagonist, who at last was undermost.

"Thou shalt die for this!" shrieked the Nazarene. "I have power with the heads of the Government. By Allah, by Our Lady Miriam, I will have thee tortured! Think not but I should know thee again among ten thousand!"

A heavy blow from a quarterstaff stretched him senseless. Muhammad himself had come to end the fray. "Praise be to Allah!" he said piously, and, kneeling, fell to rifling the body.

Mabrûk, all dishevelled, and bleeding from a corner of his mouth, stood panting, gazing at the lifeless form. He faltered: "There is neither power nor might, save in Allah the High, the Tremendous!" supposing, in the muddle of his wits, that he had slain a man.

"He is not dead, in sh' Allah," said Muhammad. "By the Prophet, thou hast done well. Here is a purse full of gold—fifty pounds at least—one half of which shall be thine own, as a reward of bravery."

But Mabrûk had heard nothing but the glad assurance that the man lying there at his feet was not dead. With the deep breath of relief which he drew on these tidings he once more saw clearly the outer palm-trunks reddened as with blood, the rich gloom within the grove, and the shapes of wayfarers hurrying through clouds of dust towards the shadowy trees and towers of Kafr

Zeyn. Through all the struggle and the outcry the cooing of the doves had never ceased.

"Go in safety!" cried Muhammad at length; when, as at a word expected, the merchants, seven in number, lifted their foreheads out of the dust of the highway. While surveying their surroundings somewhat ruefully, they blessed the robber as a kind preserver. By his directions they brought the donkey of the Syrian down the bank, and laid his senseless form thereon, joining with their despoiler in expressions of regret for so untoward an accident. Muhammad blessed them as they resumed their way. He then told his followers to disperse and wander homeward, unless they desired a bout with the watchmen of Kafr Zeyn, ten sturdy rogues renowned for cudgel-play.

The hint was enough. Hurriedly effacing their disguise, the brigands sauntered off in all directions through the palm-grove, by groups of two and three, and holding hands, as friends rejoicing in the evening calm. The sun had set, and an ashy film came on the landscape as on dying eyes. Muhammad held the hand of Mabrûk. He said:

"By Allah, I am glad thou didst take a lead in this day's work, and hast so large a share of the spoil. In my business one is fond of sureties; and now, in the day of need, I can count upon the friendship of thy honoured father."

Whereat Mabrûk hung his head, and his hand grew limp in the hand of the robber.

CHAPTER VI

The Sheykh Mustafa showed no anger when informed of his son's crime. He merely bore witness to the Unity of God, and fingered his beard a space, letting the tidings find a place in his mind among things known, while his face changed slowly from dismay to resignation. When Muhammad en-Nûri extolled the manliness of his new companion, and told with what fury he had fallen on that wealthy Syrian, the old man never stirred a muscle; nor did the penitence of Mabrûk, his tears and self-reproach, move him otherwise than to a shrug of impatience. But he allowed the robber to treat him with a new familiarity, thus tacitly admitting that his son's rash conduct made a bond between them; and in manner he was no longer the omdeh, petty tyrant of the village. His countenance, which had once been open, now hid something; his voice acquired new suavity; he frowned on no man, yet was always frowning.

Beholding, as he asserted, ruin close to him, he made Mabrûk write again to Saïd Bey Ramadân. his friend at Court, saying that he had enemies and feared calamity.

This Saïd, from a scullion in the household of the Khedive Ismaîl, had risen to be his confidential steward in matters calling for the strictest privacy; and he had been confirmed in his appointments by the son of Ismaîl, the new Khedive, Muhammad Tewfik. He was a man whom Ministers of State and generals courted; and the Sheykh Mustafa hoped everything from his intervention. He asked no more than a show of favour which should cow his enemies, and, building on the assurances he had at divers times received of His Excellency's friendship, thought this could hardly be refused him. But even this last, most reasonable, hope was doomed to disappointment.

One morning, when Mabrûk was sitting under the palm-tree in his father's yard, in conversation with the ghufara, or village watchmen, who had come to take their orders from the omdeh, a sound of hoof-beats echoed through the village, and a voice was heard begging, in polite Arabic, for direction to the dwelling of the Sheykh Mustafa. A minute later, a bare-legged serving-man led into the yard a mule, on which sat a fat old man, clad in the frock-coat and dark trousers of officialdom. The watchmen grasped their staves and sprang to attention. Mabrûk ran forward with choice blessings. But that old man wagged his head sadly, and so did the servant. Master and man alike seemed woe-begone, the prey of hidden grief.

"Is the Sheykh Mustafa in the house?" asked the rider in a tearful voice. And on Mabrûk

replying in the affirmative, that fat one blessed him and inquired his name.

"Mabrûk, the son of Mustafa."

"Ha, is it so? Help me to alight, that I may embrace thee. I am Saïd Bey Ramadân, the poor slave of Allah, and thy father's friend."

The old man brushed away a tear with his coat-sleeve, while his servant cried: "O Muslimîn!" and groaned aloud. Dismounting painfully with the help of Mabrûk, he cast a shy glance round upon the filthy yard, the palm-tree stained with dust to half its height, the poor hovels, and some unkempt women who had come out to stare at his arrival. He said:

"Ma sh' Allah! What a splendid place! Thy father is blessed indeed. Would to Allah all were rich as he! O my soul! O my liver! O High Protector!" To which the servant appended: "O Salvation! Some are blessed indeed!"

A crowd was fast collecting as noise of the great one's coming spread throughout the village. The Sheykh Mustafa came running, with eyes downcast, hands reverently tucked in his loose sleeves. He would have kissed the dusty boots of his patron, but the latter and his servant between them restrained him by main force.

"I ask pardon of Allah!" cried the Bey in horrified protest. "Allah witness, it is for me to prostrate myself. How art thou, O my dear? Please God, in the extremity of health and happiness. As for me . . . O Lord! O pity! O Divine Preserver!"

He flung his arms around the omdeh's neck and wept in self-abandonment. The Sheykh Mustafa, Mabrûk, and the servant supported him into the guest-room with soothing words, while the crowd without praised Allah for the miracle of condescension in a man so noble.

Installed in the place of honour on the divan, his legs crossed upon soft pillows, that old man raised his streaming eyes, and asked a blessing on the house and all its inmates. Ma sh' Allah, never in his life before had he seen a room so pleasant for repose, nor yet been confronted with faces so distinguished and delicious to the eye. "By Allah, it is an honour for us to be here!" chorussed his servant from a low seat near the door.

The guest-chamber filled rapidly with men of the village, who came in one by one, slipped off their shoes, and saluted humbly at the threshold, and took the lowest place that happened to be vacant. Forms of women, some with children on their shoulders, filled the doorway, shutting out the dirty yard.

The Bey kept fondling his host's hand, and blubbering: "Art thou in good health? Art thou happy?" gazing in his face with sad insistence. He showed the like solicitude for the welfare of all present; and all praised Allah for His mercies, and in return asked for tidings of his honour's state of mind and body. When he could no longer evade these kind inquiries, the great man lifted up his voice and wept anew. Upon that, as at a signal, his servant raised a

piteous howl: "O Salvation! Alas, my master! Alas, the wickedness of this world, my master!"

Dismay was painted on the listening faces. The Sheykh Mustafa seized the hand of his guest, and, carrying it to his lips, adjured His Excellency, by the Prophet, by the Sayyid Ahmed el-Bedawi, to make known the cause of sadness, hiding nothing. Then, by degrees, the fat Bey's woeful exclamations assumed coherence and became a story.

"O Protector! O my shame, my dire disgrace! Behold me faint with grief! Listen, O my masters, and let the story of my days be for a lesson to him who needs instruction.

"It is known how I enjoyed the favour of our sovereign Ismaîl Basha—may Allah preserve him!—whom the Franks, his enemies, pushed from off the throne. Ah, that was a prince! What munificence! What magnanimity! His Highness spent millions of pounds to his own glory in mighty works which will live after him. He would give a man a hundred pounds bakshîsh, and count it nothing; and yet he was no simpleton—ah no, not that, by Allah!—but was keenest at a bargain of any man I ever knew. For years he fooled the Europeans perfectly, making their cunning aims subserve his ends, as witness the Conquest of the Sûdân under pretence of putting down the trade in slaves, when, all the while, His Highness encouraged the traders, buying slaves himself by the thousand. But at last, by the very greatness of his soul, he fell a prey to them. His boundless liberality and more than kingly display

at length involved him in debt, and the Franks were his creditors. A pleasant man he was; may Our Lord bless him in his place of exile! Well do I remember the delight he took in cheating me once of two piastres over my accounts. His affability was such that he never wearied of recounting the trifling incident to his friends and courtiers in my presence.

"But, alas! with my lord his son all is different. He is noble and upright, none like him, but he has not his father's subtlety. More than once in old days has my lord his father said to me: 'My son is a good man,' meaning he lacked subtlety; and again: 'The prince Muhammad Tewfik is honest, and admires the Franks. Wait, and you shall see how the Franks will feed on him.' But I, poor servant, loving the good prince his son, always stood up for him, even at the risk of angering my kind lord and sovereign. Am I not of the family, as a slave might be? Is not the whole race dear to me as my own manhood? As a slave I passed with the inheritance from father to son, and I call Allah to witness that I served the son with the same punctuality and devotion with which I had served the father; though the cares of my position were far greater, owing to the close inspection instituted in all departments with a view to economy, and the emoluments far less, for there are no such lavish bounties now as formerly. I no longer enjoyed the inestimable privilege of free and jovial converse with my sovereign. Yet I never defrauded my good lord in the smallest matter, nor overstated my account

by one bara. No, by the Prophet, that is not the charge against me. And yet I am dismissed. Yes, O my dear friends, yes, in very truth—I, Saïd Ramadân, friend and confidant of the father, the devoted slave of the whole race, am cast out like any hireling. And for what? Just Allah! You will never guess! Not for any dereliction of duty, not for any disobedience; but simply because I from time to time received little presents from the kindness of my friends and well-wishers. Is it not unheard of? Is it not incredible? Is not the mind of the Frank apparent in it? Alas, the ruin of the house I love! O Lord, that I should live to see the son of Ismaîl, the descendant of Muhammad Ali, a puppet in the hands of filthy Franks!"

The narrator paused and buried his face in his hands a minute, while his servant by the door uttered the monotonous groans of one in frightful pain. The eyes of all his audience streamed through sympathy, and the women from without cried: "Allah comfort thee, thou ill-used man!"

Gulping down a sob, he resumed:

"I am a Muslim, and I leave my cause to God! In the days of Ismaîl Basha, I had the ear of my sovereign, who was pleased to trust my word on many matters which lay outside the sphere of his official cognizance; nay, often he would act on my report, not disdaining openly to name the humble channel of his information. It became known in the land that I had influence, and men ill-used by any public functionary, or wrongfully accused before the judge, would seek my inter-

cession with the sovereign, and in their gratitude for my good offices would sometimes make some trifling present to me. It was an established custom in the household; every one of the courtiers did the like; and how was I to know that things were altered nowadays? I am an old man, O my masters, and in age the joints of the mind grow stiff like those of the body; they lack the suppleness of youth, and cannot easily adopt new postures, nor forsake the old. Younger men in the palace took advantage of this my infirmity. They, through obsequiousness, learnt the foreign ideas of the new sovereign, and set themselves to spy upon their fellow-servants. A week ago I was summoned to the august presence, when His Highness spoke most kindly to me, but regretted that he found it necessary to dismiss me. He deigned to give his reason for so doing, which was that I received every week presents of meat and fowls and vegetables from my friends in the country, and that I sold the said gifts in the market to my own profit, myself being fed from His Highness's kitchen. This—merciful Allah!—His Highness called dishonesty. I flung myself, old as I am, at his feet. I licked his boots all over in my despair; for is not my soul the bondman of that illustrious house, and was it not to drive me forth into a world of strangers? But Efendina was inexorable, though he spoke in kindness, recalling my long services, and making me a present in money from his private purse. May Allah bless him always! But what to me is money—to me cast out from

the service, from the life I know and love? And to be called dishonest, however gently—I, who served his father faithfully so many years, shrinking from no employment, however vile and dishonouring, I so loved him! And to be sent forth now, when our good lord needs have loyal men about him; when the dervishes revile him on account of the suppression of the dôseh; when the Ulema and the notables all murmur because of his too rigorous repression of the traffic in slaves; when the army manifests a will of its own, independent of the sovereign. Ah me, the ruin of the house I love! O Allah, slay and burn the infidels who have lured my dear lord into such a pass! I am old and growing feeble, yet would I fain have spent my last remaining powers of mind and body in guarding my master in the hour of danger, in helping to defend the throne of the son of Ismaîl.

"Since that hour of my ignominy, that cruel hour, I have been a wanderer in the land, a beggar whose one cry is 'Allah, pity!' Honour obliged me to go to those kind friends who sent me gifts, to inform them of my fall and how I could no longer serve them. It was in the house of one of them, three hours from hence, that yesterday I received thy dear letter, O best of sheykhs. Alas, my sorrow! Woe, woe, the wreck of all my joy! Allah is greatest!"

At the conclusion of his tale, he sobbed anew, while his servant by the door intoned a solemn dirge, picturing every phase of the calamity, and bidding Allah and the world regard it. The

women in the doorway wailed as for the dead. The men all round the room murmured loudly of compassion. The Sheykh Mustafa wept silently, having witnessed the collapse of his last stay. But even in the abyss of grief he was mindful of hospitality, and begged that ill-used man to honour his poor house a month, a year. At once, as if he had been expecting the invitation, Saïd Bey told his man to bring in the saddle-bags.

CHAPTER VII

Every morning Saïd Bey Ramadân rose to depart, but always yielded to the prayer of the Sheykh Mustafa that he would adorn the village yet another day. Whoever was idle came and sat with him, and listened to his tale of former grandeur. With the women and children he was soon a favourite, being a gentle, garrulous old man, with a taste for innocent jests, and a happy knack of adjusting his frame of mind to fit his audience. Mabrûk's little sister, Na'imeh, followed him about everywhere; and he took pleasure in her company, calling her his sugar-plum, his little bride. Led by her, he would walk out among the fields, to see the cattle browsing and the folks at work.

Outside the immediate household of his host, the person whose acquaintance he most prized was Muhammad en-Nûri. He would hold the robber's hand for minutes together, gazing rapt into his face, and saying: "Thou hast revived the deeds of 'Antara and Abu Zeyd. The Turks pronounce us cowards here in Masr; but they lie, so long as thou art in existence. Our Lord increase thy strength and grant thee life!" And

he would make the hero relate one or two of his exploits.

Since the desperate affair at Kafr Zeyn, Muhammad had led a quiet life, working in the fields by day, and going to rest at night like other men. Three weeks had now elapsed since that bold stroke, and all seemed peaceful as the sky at noon. The village of Kafr Zeyn had been visited, its omdeh flogged, and that was all. This very stillness vexed the robber's mind, as a thing unnatural, therefore to be feared. He imagined it ominous, a hush of small birds where the falcon hovers; and, knowing Saïd Bey for a man of wide experience, he ventured to seek his judgment on the subject.

It was one bright noonday when the old man, with Na'imeh, had come to a clump of trees amid the fields, where a bullock trudged round in the shade, turning a sakieh, of which the groan and creak were heard afar. Mabrûk and the brigand, having charge of the contrivance, had sat down beside him, looking out across the plain, where, in the great sunlight, quietly active forms of men and cattle appeared like insects feeding on a wide green leaf.

"Fear not," replied the Bey, fondling the little girl, who nestled to him. "Had it been in the days of Ismaîl thou mightst have trembled. But Allah alone knows what will happen now. Approach the mudîr with a gift!"

"The mudîr is my father and my mother," replied Muhammad. "My fear is not of him. But if the chief Government takes decided action,

the mudîr will fear for himself and so betray me. It may be that they will not breathe a word to him till they have taken me."

"The chief Government acts without informing the mudîr! O my horror! Things are changed indeed! Ismaîl said to each mudîr, mamûr, and omdeh: 'Do what pleases thee.' He would not think for them, not he! But he kept his fear on all of them, and all was well. But now my good lord his son would think for the smallest omdeh, and teach him what to do. Fear will be nowhere since they have his orders, and can say, if things go wrong: 'Thus Efendîna wills it.' Discipline will be relaxed in all the Valley of the Nile, and the central Government must see to everything, like the master of a house with bad servants." The old man paused a while, immersed in thought. "Hear what I shall do!" he cried at length. "I shall write a letter to a friend of mine in the administration of justice, and learn from him the truth in this affair."

The robber kissed his hands with heartfelt thanks, only begging him to be discreet in writing. "Am I a babe?" the old man chuckled. "Yallah! Let us to work at once!" And he bade Mabrûk return with him to the village.

Few words passed between them by the way, the Bey's attention seeming engrossed by the prattle of the child beside him.

"Thou wilt give me a pink gamûseh, not so, O my eyes?"

"A pink gamûseh! I seek refuge in Allah! It would puzzle one to find thee that in all the

world! By Allah, that, if discovered, were a marvel to be recorded in books!" exclaimed the Bey, till Mabrûk informed him of the custom of the fellahîn to call a buffalo pink or white from the colour of certain parts irrespective of the rest of the body, when he laughed: "Yes, surely, thou shalt have thy pink gamûseh! And afterwards, O my pearl?"

But though in appearance he was thus enthralled by the little maid, his eyes betrayed more serious intentions; and about his lips there played a curious gloating smile, in place of the accustomed doleful mow.

Mabrûk had supposed himself called to act as scribe; but when, arrived at the house, he brought his writing-things into the guest-room, Saïd Bey took them out of his hands.

"Be not too fond of this robber!" he admonished Mabrûk, before setting to work. "He is manly and generous, but, like a spirited horse, he is too dangerous. Better to ride a plodding mule as I do. Better to keep to thy scholarship, O my young sage!"

The Bey sat up cross-legged on the divan bowed a little in the act of writing. The paper, folded on the palm of his left hand, was held up to within a few inches of his fat face, which changed expression as he wrote, now frowning massive, now relapsing into loose folds. There was no sound in the shady room save the scratch and squeak of the reed on the leaf, and what floated in from the yard, where Na'imeh, the little bride, was crying bitterly beneath her mother's

heavy hand. Presently a white-bearded man came to the doorway, slipped off his shoes, and entered, feeling with his staff. It was Hâfiz, the blind khatîb. He saluted, and, taking seat, fell to telling his beads, content with the sense of company. On a pause the Bey observed, as one thinking aloud :

"How strange the divergence of men's views on what is right! We should count it a grievous sin to deliver up a friend to justice. But the Franks who rule the mind of Efendîna esteem it a duty, being for the public good. Efendîna himself would think it praiseworthy."

"I ask pardon of Allah!" groaned the blind preacher. "If informers are to be honoured, there is an end of safety for poor righteous men."

"Thou speakest truth!" replied the Bey, and he wrote on in silence to the end, when, as he dusted the page to dry the ink on it, he announced his intention to post the letter with his own hand, and asked Mabrûk to tell the servant to prepare the mule. The man being nowhere to be found, Mabrûk did duty for him.

"In the name of Allah!" ejaculated the Bey, with consternation in his eyes, when, coming forth, he found no servant. "Extend thy kindness further. Behold me old and very stout, a timid rider. Consent to walk with me, holding the bridle."

"Upon my head and my eye," replied Mabrûk.

All the way to the town and back again the Bey chatted and joked with his conductor. Since the talk with Muhammad at the sakieh he had

resumed the potentate, laying aside his recent strained humility. His manner, from deprecating, had become gracious. He accompanied his talk with lofty gestures, and his eyes surveyed the landscape as a thing beneath him.

"So our guest grows ever more exacting?" said Rashîd to Mabrûk on his return. "A little more, and we shall all be slaves to him, neglecting the labour of the fields by which we live. Na'imeh no longer gathers dung for fuel; and thou must hold his bridle when he rides abroad."

Rashîd alone, of all his father's house, derived no gratification from the great one's presence there. Regarding all grandees as beasts of prey, he saw nothing but depredation in the continuance of an honour which obliged his father to provide a great feast every day. Even when informed by Mabrûk of the Bey's gracious effort on behalf of Muhammad en-Nûri, he only shrugged and hoped that good might come of it.

Every morning Saïd Bey Ramadân dispatched his servant to the town to ask for letters, and himself, with Na'imeh, would generally stroll along the Nile bank towards the bridge to meet the returning messenger. On the day but one after his promise to Muhammad, coming back from this early walk, he sent the little girl for Mabrûk, who came in haste from the field.

"All is well," he declared. "Our friend the robber may lay fear aside. The man robbed was the emissary of a certain Greek, a banker in Iskenderîyeh. The consul made some clamour at the first, but now is pacified."

"Praise be to Allah!" sighed Mabrûk, and wept a little in the extremity of his relief.

Every night since the crime he had revisited in imagination the palm-wood by Kafr Zeyn, and heard again the menace of the injured Syrian that he would know his face again among ten thousand. Now, please Allah, that nightmare would be taken from him. He hastened to carry the good news to the sakieh out upon the plain, where Muhammad sat in the shade with Hâfiz, the blind khatîb. The robber scratched his head, displacing cap and turban. He said:

"They are certainly deceiving the good old man. Consuls are never pacified. Would to Allah I had repaired at first to the mudirîyeh. The mudîr is my father and my mother. He would have advised me. With Allah's leave I shall go to him to-morrow with a gift, of which thou, O Mabrûk, shalt pay the half. Ten pounds is not too much for our two lives."

Mabrûk agreed, though reluctantly, for he trusted the assurance of Saïd Bey. But that night, when he disinterred his hoard, it seemed a sin to let five pieces go. His wife wept silently, on her knees beside the hole, one hand lifting up the light, the other fingering the gold which yet remained.

"Thou art mad to give it him," she whispered fiercely. "Has not the Bey declared there is no need? Thinkest thou he will give five pounds to the mudîr? That is a rich man's gift, and Muhammad is much too wise to court oppression. I tell thee, keep thy wealth; swear it has been

stolen! I myself will steal it from thee, and hide it in a place thou knowest not."

Her earnestness, and the prudence of her advice, chiming with his own inclination, overcame Mabrûk's warm liking for the robber; and when, betimes in the morning, Muhammad came and asked him for the money, he cried with gestures of despair:

"I have it not!"

Zeynab flew to his support.

"By the Corân, it is true, he has it not!" she wailed. "Mabrûk has been despoiled. O our sorrow, O our grievous loss! It must have happened yesterday, when we were all in the field. Come thyself and behold, there is nothing left!"

Muhammad turned from the woman and looked hard at Mabrûk.

"So that is the tale," he sneered. "And the moral is, thou wilt not help me. No matter, I shall give for both of us. I grudge not the bone to thee, dog, son of a dog!"

The mother of Mabrûk, hearing her son thus miscalled, ran out and joined with Zeynab in reviling the robber, who silently spat on the ground and strode away, leaving Saïd Bey, who had just come forth in horror from the guest-chamber, to do what in him lay to quell the tumult. On his return from the mudirîyeh, after nightfall, the robber sought out Mabrûk and made peace with him, saying: "What is that money between me and thee? It made me cross to see the woman leading thee. No matter. Thou art

young." He took the youth by the hand and led him to a dust-heap just outside the village, where they could talk unheard. There he told how he had seen the secretary of the mudîr, who had been cold at first till he spoke of the protection of Saïd Bey Ramadân, when the scribe had grown suddenly cordial, and congratulated him on the friendship of a man so influential.

"So it seems that the Bey spoke truth, and we have naught to fear. The praise to Allah! Hearing tell of a consul, I deemed my last hour come. Indeed, so great has been my fright that I am resolved henceforth to renounce blood-thirstiness and become, with Allah's leave, a peaceful villager."

Fondling Mabrûk's hand, the robber sat for long in silence, looking up at the sky. The leaves of a prickly pear close before them seemed a trophy of huge black hands shorn of fingers. Beyond that all was vague, a black veil covering the plain beneath the stars.

CHAPTER VIII

The sun came up in haze with the glare of a smoky furnace, dyeing the trunk of the palm-tree red as cochineal. The morning air lacked vigour, and the stir of reviving life had a note of reluctance. When Mabrûk released the cattle from the stable, the great beasts came out slowly, one by one, and with lowered muzzles sniffed the air distrustfully. It was the season of the Khamâsîn, and from these indications he judged that a khamsîn wind would blow before the night. Yawning, he sauntered down the narrow winding path between the hovels, the buffaloes in single file before him. Little Na'imeh, bare-footed and wearing a faded pink head-veil, tripped beside him, holding his hand. The village ended as abruptly as a walled city where the ground fell away to the plain. Out there all salient objects were as shadows in the fiery haze.

Suddenly, from off the selfsame heap of rubbish where Mabrûk had sat talking with the robber overnight, a man sprang up, and barred the way before them. It was a soldier.

"Go back," he commanded.

"O my dear one!" Mabrûk expostulated, his

knees trembling. "I am obliged to go to the field with my father's cattle."

"Be silent, lest I strike thy mouth. It is ordered; that suffices one like thee!"

At noise of the altercation, two more soldiers showed themselves; and one of these, an elder, interfered, saying:

"Gently, O Abdullah! Thou art too short with the youth. Know, O my son, that no one leaves this place till the Mufettish arrives from El Mahrûseh."

"But my father's cattle?"

"Let the little girl run out and guard them."

Others of the village had been stopped as they came forth; grown men and women were turned back, lamenting; children ran alone into the fields. At a word from Mabrûk, his sister sped like an arrow after others of her age, women already in coquettish grace of bearing.

"You have nothing to fear, in sh' Allah," the soldiers told the terrified fellahîn. "Our game is brigands, and you, by the looks of you, are harmless people."

At those words Mabrûk went dead from the throat downwards; all the life in him flew to his head, and there pulsated. Confiding his cause to Allah, he made his way back up the narrow alley.

The little yard of his father's house overflowed with a concourse of men, women, and children, the whole community flocking to the omdeh for counsel in their sore dilemma. Mabrûk, by great exertions, forced a way to the door of the guest-

room, which he reached just as Saïd Bey appeared on the threshold.

"O Bey, in pity help! O Bey, instruct us what to do!" prayed the demented villagers.

The old man raised his hands and eyes to heaven with a face of woe. He was about to speak, when Rashîd thrust him rudely aside, hissing: "We have seen thy power, O helper of Muhammad en-Nûri!" and himself addressed the crowd. The Bey retreated hastily into the room, with horrified appeals to One Above.

Rashîd's firm voice and pleasant smile were hope to the despairing people. With one accord they surged towards their favourite. His robe was pulled this way and that; outspread hands were thrust into his face in the eagerness of all, who could get near enough, to make him hear their views as to what should be done. "Let the robber be given up!" "Let the omdeh seize the robber and deliver him over to the soldiers! He is, after all, a stranger!"

"Listen! Listen, all of you!" Rashîd kept shouting, till at length he could make his voice heard above the din. "My father parleys with the soldiers. After a little he will return and tell us what to do. If we move against Muhammad, the robber will denounce his confederates."

Upon that there fell a hush so profound that the chuckle of a boy who had swarmed up the palm-trunk to a height above the roofs, addressed to some child below (for children play to children, dogs to dogs), drew all men's gaze upon the climber, who, scared by so many eyes, fell

sprawling down upon the heads and straightway howled. A dozen hands seized hold of the disturber, half-strangling him in vain attempts to stop his noise, for Rashîd was still speaking and all wished to hear what he said.

"But the Nûri is an upright man and generous. So long as we keep faith with him, he will not betray us. May Allah help him to escape his enemies!"

"True, true! May Allah help him!" exclaimed the crowd, carried away by such noble sentiments; but their mind was instantly diverted by the appearance beside Rashîd of the Sheykh Mustafa, who had passed through their midst unobserved.

"The omdeh! Behold the omdeh! May Allah preserve thee, O Sheykh. What news, O Mustafa?"

The Sheykh Mustafa flung up his hands.

"Allah is greatest! The Mufettish approaches! While yet I reasoned with the soldiers, a rider came to say that His Excellency was on the point of starting from the town. Make haste to prepare the place. Call out the watchmen."

"O Lord of the Worlds! May Allah pity thee, thou ill-used man!"

The omdeh could not stop to hear condolences. His care being to give such a reception to the Inquisitor that the mind which controlled the fate of the whole village might be softened and inclined to mercy, he rushed hither and thither, pushing men about and shouting directions. The watchmen, seven in number, were told to wait on the outskirts of the village, to run before His Excellency and shout his praises. Men and

women set to work to sweep the rugs of the guest-chamber and dust the cushions of the divan; others to purge the narrow ways of filth, to borrow dainties of conserve and sweetmeat, to grind coffee and mingle divers kinds of sherbet. Faces streamed with perspiration, for the air was breathless; but no one showed fatigue or lack of interest. All made haste as though their lives depended on it. Children at their play upon the ground were kicked and flung aside like dogs or baskets. A blind man, groping his way round the yard by the walls, was hustled till he knew not where he stood.

All at once loud shouts were heard on the outskirts of the village. They drew nearer, settling down into a kind of frenzied chant, and the watchmen burst into the yard, each in dust-coloured robe and high brown libdeh, laying about them with their staves. They caught men and women by the throat and flung them back against the wall; the blind man was hurled headlong through a doorway; Mabrûk, crossing to the guest-room with a dish of comfits, was seized and cast aside, the sweets dispersed; and all the while they yelled in praise of Power, with sweat streaming from every pore and wide unseeing eyes, like mad fanatics. Mabrûk, collecting his shaken limbs, slipped round by the walls to the door of the guest-chamber, where his father and brother, with Saïd Bey Ramadân, stood expectant. By that time the watchmen were undergoing the same treatment which a minute before they had meted out to the crowd, being

hurled aside and beaten by the men of the Inquisitor's escort. All eyes were downcast, all hands reverently folded, when the dread one reined in his horse at the guest-room door. In the twinkling of an eye the Sheykh Mustafa was on his knees beside the stirrup, ardently dusting the Inquisitor's boot with his tongue.

"Enough! Enough, by Allah! I forbid thee to do so! It is a shame for thee, an old man and a Muslim!"

The speaker was a lean Turk with a trim black beard and moustache, his face pale from ill-health, his keen black eyes set rather close on either side of a thin, hooked nose. Clad in the frock-coat and trousers, he was all black and white save for the scarlet fez. Alighting, he cast a keen glance round upon those present, when Mabrûk, for an instant, felt his soul laid bare. Then he passed into the guest-chamber.

Mabrûk then ran and held the head of the ass from which was in act to alight His Honour's Coptic scribe—a fat young man, wearing a Frankish suit beneath the fez, in whom the fellâh, with a pang, beheld his former self. Rashîd, whispering that he was going to seek Muhammad, tried to sneak out of the yard, but was stopped and turned back by a sentry. He and Mabrûk, pushing through the anxious group at the door, entered the guest-chamber, and sat down with the elders. They found the Inquisitor sitting beside Saïd Bey Ramadân, talking with him as an old friend. With some relief Mabrûk realized that the Syrian was not present.

At length the Inquisitor ceased his private conversation with the Bey, and asked:

"Where is the omdeh?"

"I am he."

The Sheykh Mustafa rose and stood before him as before a vision whose celestial light distressed him.

"There is in this village a brigand, a known robber."

"I ask pardon of Allah, O my lord! A robber! Have we harboured a robber unawares? I seek refuge in Allah from Satan the Stoned. Praise to the Highest that we are not all despoiled, that we have not all been murdered while we slept!"

The rest of the villagers joined their spokesman in a gasp, a sudden palsy of the limbs.

"I condole with you," observed the Inquisitor, with dry politeness. "But now, I entreat you, waste no time in words. Produce the man named Muhammad en-Nûri."

At that the Sheykh Mustafa donned a bewildered air, and scanned the faces of those present.

"I see him not. He is not here. Where is he?" Catching sight of the high felt cap of a watchman in the doorway, he cried out: "O ghafîr, run, fetch the wicked rogue!"

At that six of the seven watchmen set off like the wind with fierce cries, but the seventh, the one addressed, remained, and said:

"He is not in the house. The woman belonging to him said that he had gone upon a journey."

The omdeh turned distractedly to the Inquisitor.

"Not in the house—gone on a journey. Thou hast heard, O Excellency? What can I do?"

The lean, white fingers of His Excellency toyed with his close black beard. With a charming smile, he shrugged:

"What canst thou do? Is that my business? Do what pleases thee."

"Not here; gone on a journey," repeated the old fellâh, with an effect of perfect idiocy; and the words and tone were reproduced by the other villagers, as though they saw a blank wall suddenly.

"Thou art a good man and the owner of intelligence," pursued the Inquisitor, with studied kindness. "I wish thee well for the sake of Saïd Bey, who is thy friend. Have no fear, but listen. Give up lying, for it leads to punishment; and, by Allah, it would distress me to see thy reverend back made bare to meet the scourge. Moreover, lying is no use, for we have certain information that the said Muhammad, surnamed Nûri, went yesterday to the mudrîyeh, that he returned after sunset, and spent this night here. Since midnight every exit has been guarded; no one has gone forth from the village. I therefore leave it to thy judgment to decide where the man in question now is. Think not to cast doubt on what I tell thee, for our informant is no stranger to the place."

The omdeh dealt a savage scowl to Mahrûs, his ancient enemy, who passed on the look and its suspicion to a neighbour on the divan. All the fellahîn moved uneasily, and looked askance at

one another. Mabrûk alone, whose eyes were for the great and civilized, had seen the hand of Saïd Bey Ramadân, his father's guest, clutch trembling at the sleeve of the Inquisitor. He prayed upon himself the prayers of death. That cunning devil knew all about the robbery of the Syrian. As he sat there, smiling, with hands locked on his paunch, the treacherous dog had the lives of all present in his power for good or ill, since, from loving-kindness towards an ill-used man, the villagers had told him all their secrets.

CHAPTER IX

A SUDDEN gust of wind swept the yard without, slamming doors and shutters, and filling the air with warmth and fine brown dust. Men covered up their mouths.

"The khamsîn! Close the door, make fast the shutters!" cried the omdeh, dreading the effect which discomfort might produce upon the temper of the Inquisitor. But before the doorway could be cleared of spectators, the watchmen came running through the dun cloud which had risen over all things, brandishing their staves, and crying, "Praise to Allah! They have caught the wicked!"

"Praise to Allah!" echoed the elders in the room.

"O the pity! Our Lord have mercy on him!" said Rashîd at his brother's ear.

The watchmen stood by the door, panting and pressing their hands to their sides.

The next minute sounds of boisterous mirth were heard approaching, causing amazement to the frightened fellahîn. Mabrûk, gazing anywhere sooner than at the sly old traitor, saw a huddle of soldiers enter the yard, embracing

rather than holding the stalwart form of the Nûri, with whom they seemed on joking terms. On realizing that they could be seen, they became suddenly alert; two of them seized each a wrist of the miscreant and dragged him along between them, while the others ran before or behind, spitting at his face or punching him in the back with loud imprecations. In this manner he was hauled into the guest-room and brought to a stand before the Mufettish, whom the soldiers saluted with conscious pride in their achievement.

"Efendim, behold the robber!" their spokesman panted. "By Allah, we have had hard work to catch him, for he is as clever as a devil. He came and sat with us, who knew him not, beguiling our long watch with merry tales, till we deemed him the most respectable of men. Twice did he try to run from us out into the fields, declaring that his cow was straying, but we caught him each time, and returned with laughter, amused with his distress about a cow. Then a ghafîr came running out of the village, crying, 'O Muhammad, let me capture thee!' and, tripping on a stone, fell forward on his nose. At the shout our boon companion ran in earnest. Ah, by our lord el-Bedawi, we had a race for it! The ghafîr it was—a runner like heaven's lightning—who overtook him at the last, and rolled with him, getting stabbed in the arm. Then, seeing we were eight to one, he gave up struggling, and we had carried him back to the village before the hot wind came and took our strength away."

"Praise be to Allah!" said the Mufettish languidly. Turning to Saïd Bey Ramadân, he remarked: "It is very hot."

"Wallahi!" came the gasping rejoinder. "Would to Allah we were in the city, in a proper house!"

Those two complaining of the heat in common tones, regardless of the strained, wild faces of the fellahîn and the hopeless figure of the doomed man in their midst was a horror which Mabrûk could not endure. The whole scene swam before his eyes as he waited in a torture of suspense, expecting every minute to be denounced by the betrayer.

At length the Inquisitor took notice of the captive.

"Thy name is Muhammad en-Nûri?"

The robber admitted it humbly.

"Thou art a robber and a murderer."

"No, by my life, O sun of justice, I am the most peaceable of men. They have misled thy benevolence who tell such tales of me. Ask all men present, and they will inform thee that I never wronged a man among them."

At that all present sang his praises warmly, exclaiming:

"He speaks truth. This robber is a good, righteous man, O Excellency, and loves the poor. He is a Muslim, too, and given to good works. He has presented a fine new kisweh to our village Sheykh, Selîm the Donkey-driver."

"Is it in truth the man we seek?" asked the Mufettish in an undertone of Saïd Bey Ramadân,

who, nodding speechless, stretched out his hands towards Muhammad and wailed:

"May Allah pity thee, O my poor friend!"

"Hast thou anything to say?" asked the Inquisitor.

"Only that I am between thy two hands."

Muhammad, with swift grace, bent down and kissed those hands, then stood upright.

"Take him outside and bind him! And thou, O Sheykh, as omdeh of his village, prepare to accompany him to the town. There he will be examined, and confronted with a certain Shâmi, his chief accuser, who was too ill to ride out hither. If the identification is without doubt, he will be removed to the capital by train this evening. In all likelihood he will be hanged eventually."

At that word all the listeners sought refuge in Allah Most High, asking Allah to have pity on a much-wronged man; and Mabrûk, thinking the inquiry over, began to breathe more freely. But the Inquisitor beckoned his scribe, and conferred with him in whispers. "Read the description well, and look about thee!" he said aloud, in conclusion. Mabrûk's heart beat in his head as the Copt unfolded a paper, and, reading it, proceeded to scan each face of the assembly. Looking at the examiner, Mabrûk recalled his comrades at the School of Medicine, and pictured their civilized horror when they heard he was a convicted felon.

"It is hard to judge from this," the scribe murmured apologetically. "A pity the young man was too ill to bear us company."

"He was not ill, he was afraid," said the Mufettish irritably, snatching the paper. "Take some uncommon feature and seek for it, then compare the rest. That is the simplest way. See here, the brows slant up and outwards; that is no common trait. Look out for that."

Then Mabrûk remembered how, on the occasion of the robbery, he had lengthened his eyebrows with charcoal in the manner described. He discerned a ray of hope, but dared not entertain it with a traitor sitting there beside the judge. His eyes were fixed imploringly on Saïd Bey.

Having scrutinized all the faces twice over, in a silence broken only by an occasional whisper between the Inquisitor and Saïd Bey, or a querulous prayer to Allah from this latter, who was visibly suffering much from the heat, the Copt went out with the paper in his hand.

"Close the door behind thee, O son of a dog!" roared his chief. "We suffocate as it is, without that breath of Gehennum."

To Mabrûk, as he sat there in the darkened room in momentary expectation of his doom, it seemed that the eyes of the Mufettish were for him only, that Saïd Bey kept pointing him out with a malignant gesture, that all the fellahîn were staring at him in alarm. So strong was the delusion that he had some ado to refrain from falling at the great one's feet and confessing all. He might in the end have done so, distraught as he was, had not the scribe returned with a ghafîr named 'Ala'd-dîn in custody. It was then as if a hand that had compressed his throat let go

suddenly; his breath came again in short sobs. This 'Ala'd-dîn had brows that sloped up and outward, for which reason he was surnamed the Afrît. Moreover, in figure he was not unlike Mabrûk.

"This is the very man!" said Saïd Bey loud enough to be heard of Mabrûk, at whom he cast a private glance of sly intelligence, which caused the youth to reform his hasty judgment on the instant. A traitor? No; he was a good old man, the very best and kindest under Allah, and mindful of the law of hospitality. Tears of gratitude filled the eyes of the young fellâh.

"Yes, I am he, O Excellencies!" owned the ghafîr bashfully. "It was I, under Allah, who secured the wicked robber." So little did the poor wretch understand of the matter that he supposed he had been sent for to hear compliments upon his prowess.

"They might as well have selected a babe from the breast," whispered Rashîd in his brother's ear. "'Ala'd-dîn is a good man, with no more guile than has a sheep. He is, perhaps, the best they could have chosen, for his innocence will be manifest on the slightest examination. But Allah repay the guile of that old man! It is seen now how they hold together all these great ones, and spread the net to slay poor righteous men. Yet he has some dregs of honour, for a moment since I thought he would betray thee, and so bring ruin on the house that shelters him."

"Thou art accused of robbing and attempting to kill a certain Shâmi," said the Inquisitor to

the ghafîr, who only gaped upon the information, and, pitching on the last word, said with a grin:

"Shâmi — I am no Shâmi, O Beatitude! Thanks to Allah, I am a true believer born in Masr."

"Thy imbecility is well acted," said the Inquisitor angrily, conceiving himself mocked. "In sh' Allah, we shall presently find means to dissipate it."

With that he bade two soldiers bind the rogue. At the same time Saïd Bey Ramadân called loudly for his servant to prepare the mule.

"Our work here is now done, by the grace of Allah," said the Inquisitor, rising; and the whole room rose with blessings on His Honour.

"The world outside is not fit for your Excellencies," protested the omdeh. "All is khamsîn. Rest here, I beseech you, until the evening. My house is your house. Do me the honour."

But the Mufettish took no heed of his politeness, and Saïd Bey Ramadân seemed at last really bent on departure. Outside the door the fat Bey fell a-blubbering. He embraced Mabrûk and blessed him tenderly, and then called for Na'imeh, his little bride. Mabrûk assisted him to mount his mule, and saw him lean towards the Mufettish, who was already in the saddle, and address him in a whisper. The Turk replied aloud, with a curious smile:

"Such things regard not Efendîna personally. Besides, thou knowest how his soul hates

subtlety. Nevertheless, thy services shall be recorded. What wouldst thou, O my dear? How can we pay thee? The guerdon of a common spy would be too little."

Whereat the poor old man seemed sore dismayed, and fell to weeping and lamenting as at his first coming.

CHAPTER X

The wife and children of Muhammad en-Nûri, and the whole family, even to the grandmother, of the unfortunate 'Ala'd-dîn, followed the soldiers and their prisoners, while the little band of great ones, the omdeh among them, rode on ahead. Mabrûk with the rest of the villagers crowded out on the dust-heaps to watch them depart, calling down curses on the rulers of the land, the soldiers—all who vex the poor and make life dangerous. The Sheykh Mustafa, at parting from his sons, had made known to them in brief the dispositions of his will, lest, peradventure, he might not return; and the eyes of both young men were dim in consequence as they watched the sad procession wend along the Nile bank.

It was noon, but the sun was darkened. A brown cloud continually rising off the face of the earth met a brown cloud continually falling from the lowering sky. From the dykes and the embankment of the railway, from the fallows and the dust-heaps of the village, dust rolled like smoke in dense whirls distinct from that suspended in the atmosphere, which discoloured the whole world. The little procession, amid the

stifling gloom, seemed, for all its diverse movement and bright hues, a thing imprisoned. The very cries of the women, mourning as for the dead, were muffled by the thick air.

All at once a man cried, "Pray! It is for impiety this grief has come upon us. Pray, O my children, for the appointed hour draws near!" and straight began to chant the call to prayer. It was Hâfiz, the blind khatîb. All those who were left behind made haste every one to his own house, there to perform his ablutions and the noonday prayer. The world had never known so dark a day.

Mabrûk found Zeynab spread out upon the ground in grief, in keen remorse for her deception of Muhammad en-Nûri.

"Alas, the ill-used man, the poor one! He blessed me as they led him forth to die. By the Prophet, he is a martyr, nothing less; for he is a Muslim, while his accuser is a pig, a Nazarene, a Shâmi, worse than a Copt! Would to Allah we had not denied to him those five gold pieces. And the wicked ones will slay our father, the righteous Mustafa. At least they will beat him on the feet, the poor one! O ruin of our house! O my terror! O my despair!"

Mabrûk sat down on the ground, in the darkest corner of the little room, and hid his face in his hands. Zeynab, as her manner was when agitated, busied herself with cleaning of utensils and moving this and that without a cause, never ceasing to bemoan the evil day. The door was closed, the window shuttered to keep out the

stifling wind. The child, oppressed by the heat, was fretful, and kept crying; the like sounds of lamentation came from across the yard, where the voice of Rashîd could be heard, striving in vain to comfort the older women. Mabrûk, by dint of sitting still, sank at last to sleep. He was wakened by Zeynab's two hands upon his shoulders. She lay along the ground, and with bosom resting on his knees, held her face close to his, while her eyes implored him.

"I ask a boon of thee, O beloved. Take the five pounds we so cruelly withheld from that poor robber, add to them other five pounds, and give the whole to his wife and children, who will now be destitute. See, I have got the money ready in this little purse. Thus we may make amends. Say not No, I entreat thee, for my peace of mind."

"In the name of Allah," assented Mabrûk, and took the purse.

The plan of generosity eased him of the sense of baseness which had weighed him down. Having devoured some food his wife prepared for him, and smoked a little to compose his mind, he put the purse in his bosom and strolled forth along the Nile bank, meaning to waylay the wife of Muhammad as she returned from the town. The warm wind still blew, and as it drew towards evening the colour of the dust-laden air changed slowly from drab to coffee colour. The Nile bank, usually thronged at that hour, was entirely deserted. He crossed the railway with precaution, and sauntered on till he came to the

passenger-bridge, near the end of which he sat down and waited. The Nile, reflecting the prevailing brown, seemed all of mud. The roof-lines of the town appeared and disappeared by caprice of the clouds of dust which drove across them. He had not sat long ere his ears heard footsteps on the bridge, and, looking, he beheld a little crowd approaching. Cowled women raised their hands and cried to heaven as they shuffled to keep up with some men, who bore what seemed a dead or dying man. He knew them; they were people of his village.

"There is no power nor might save in Allah, the High, the Tremendous!" he ejaculated, fearing to see the corpse of his own father, ere he inquired: "What is it, O ye people? Who is dead?"

"Alas, the poor one! O the ill-used man! O 'Ala'd-dîn, may Allah comfort thee!" The women, quite regardless of his question, pursued their grievous outcry; but one of the men explained: "He is not dead, O Mabrûk. But they have made his feet so that he cannot walk."

"O Allah Most High! But it is not civilized to treat men thus. It has been forbidden by the law these many years."

"Nay, by thy leave, O my dear, it is lawful to be done in private. The law only forbids it in public and by authority. The Inquisitor knew nothing of it; the soldiers of the town did it in their zeal to further business. Thou understandest, there is a consul in this affair, and when a consul demands justice, all things are

lawful; his lust must be satisfied. I blame not the torturers, for a blind man could see they were at their wits' end. Yet it is hard on 'Ala'd-dîn, since after all he is released and found quite innocent. But what would you, O my masters? The world is so."

"What chiefly grieves me, O my lord Mabrûk," complained the tortured man himself, in a weak voice, "is that I am no longer a ghafîr—I who caught the robber this same morning, and was stabbed in the arm by him. When the Shâmi told them I was not the man, I thought they would have restored me to my office. But it matters less, because thy father is deposed from being omdeh. I love thy honoured father, and should not care to serve another man."

"What of my father? Tell me."

"All is well, in sh' Allah, though they still detain him. In an hour or so, please God, he will return in safety. They have treated him honourably, save that he is to be no more omdeh."

"And the wife of Muhammad en-Nûri and his children?"

"The woman told us her intention to follow the robber to Masr. She has money, and hopes by her alms to ease his lot in prison."

"In the name of Allah, Merciful, Compassionate!" exclaimed Mabrûk.

Going close to 'Ala'd-dîn, he took the purse from his breast and thrust it into a horny hand which pain made claw-like. It took the sufferer time to guess the nature of the gift, but when he realized it he cried out: "But—merciful Allah!—

why to me, O dear one? What have I done to deserve such generosity?"

"What has he given thee? Let us see!" exclaimed the women, crowding round; and when it was shown to them they cried in gladness: "A purse of gold! May Allah reward his bounty! Now art thou well again. Now will the pain feel less, thou poor ill-used one! Ah, the kind, generous youth, thus to enrich thee!" Neither they nor the men begrudged good fortune to a tortured wretch, but made much of it to divert his mind, smiling amid their grief to show him happiness.

"But—O Salvation!—what have I ever done to merit this from thee?" asked 'Ala'd-dîn once more.

Mabrûk leaned close and whispered in the sufferer's ear. "Dost understand?" he asked aloud.

Intelligence was slow to dawn upon that face distressed with pain; but when at length it broke, the man cried out as if in fear:

"Now Allah prolong thy life. Our Lord reward thee! Truly thou art the most generous of all men living. By Allah, I had not an inkling of the truth. Thou hadst no debt to me. There is not thy like in all the world for honour. The Prince of Believers himself could not have dealt more honourably. 'Ala'd-dîn is now thy slave till death."

CHAPTER XI

At early dawn Mabrûk came out into the yard and met his father. The air was clean and sweet. A breeze stirred the plumes of the palm-tree overhead. Gloom and oppression had vanished with the khamsîn, making the horrors of the day before incredible as a remembered nightmare. The face of the Sheykh Mustafa shone with the gladness of a man reprieved from execution. He devoted more time than usual to the morning prayer, and in the performance of that duty showed a saintly fervour edifying to behold. Rising at length, and returning to things of earth, he kissed his son repeatedly on both cheeks, and gave loud thanks to Allah and the Sayyid Ahmed el-Bedawi.

"By Allah's leave," he cried, "I shall visit the shrine of the Father of Consolation with thee and all my house upon the occasion of his birth-feast in the coming month. I vow to touch his noble tomb with the hand of honour in circumambulation seven times on every one of the seven days which the Môlid lasts, and also to make an offering of money to the guardians of the sanctuary for distribution to the poor of Tanta, in thanks-

giving for my miraculous deliverance. For yesterday, at the coming of the Inquisitor, my soul cried in me: 'O Sheykh of the Arabs!' and on the way to the town, and while the prisoners were being examined, I ceased not from importuning our Lord Ahmed. And the Sheykh of the Arabs—may Allah accept him!—was not deaf to my petition, for here I am unhurt in wealth and person. Seeing I was the friend of Saïd Bey Ramadân, the slaves of Power did not ill-use me. Their reprimand was clothed in terms polite, so that I, who expected obloquy, esteemed it a gracious favour. I am no longer omdeh, it is true, but that will be my gain in peace and quiet. How much better to sit at ease with the many, and find fault, than to toil alone on high, and be found fault with! By the Corân, I am curious to see how Mahrûs will thrive in my place—a man with the intelligence of an ass and the patience of a crossed hornet! It is sure to be a fine display. The praise to Allah and the Sayyid Ahmed!"

So saying, he opened the stable-door for the cattle to come forth, and, taking up a goad, followed them out to the field, Mabrûk with him. It was the hour when shadows stretch themselves like waking men, and every surface looking towards the sun is gilded redly. The faces of all whom they met bespoke the gladness of immense relief. Mabrûk alone was pensive, fearing lest search should yet be made for him. Someone called to him from behind, when, turning, he saw 'Ala'd-dîn hobbling after him as fast as he could with the help of a staff.

"In the name of Allah," said that ill-used man, when he had come near enough to whisper, "flee this place; for this night, as I lay awake because of my feet hurting me, it became evident to my mind that thou art still in danger. That infidel, whose truthfulness released me, is still in the neighbourhood. Take thy wife and child and thy staff, and journey an hour or two to some friend's house, where thou canst abide in safety till the affair is forgotten. By Allah, the wealth thou gavest is my shame until I know thee safe. Run and take counsel with thy respected father, while I return and warn the people of thy house, and make ready the ass for thee, that no time may be lost."

Mabrûk required no further urging. Hot-foot, he ran and overtook his father near to that bunch of ancient trees which shades the sakieh. At his first word the Sheykh Mustafa sat down and gave his mind to cogitation, leaving the cattle to their own devices. Before him, across a field of bright green clover, rose a whitewashed cube surmounted by a dome of mud, fig-shaped and finely fluted. It was the tomb of the village saint, Selîm the Donkey-driver. At its base old Hâfiz, the blind khatîb, was sitting with the child who served as eyes to him, stretching his face to meet the sun's full rays, enjoying their warmth. The Sheykh Mustafa called to him:

"O Hâfiz! I dedicate the price of a fine new covering to the tomb of the favourite of Allah, if Allah delivers my house from a certain danger."

The quavering voice of the divine made answer across the clover-field:

"In good luck, O my soul! May Allah preserve thy house from every danger!"

Then, after a moment's reflection, the Sheykh Mustafa counselled his son, saying:

"Go thou to Kafr Zeyn, to the house of one Abd-ur-Râzic, and claim hospitality in the name of Allah. He will not deny thee when he learns whose son thou art. That place has been already searched; the slaves of Power have done with it. Abide there till I send to tell thee all is well. With safety, go; and keep thy journey's end a secret even from her that bore thee!"

With that the elder took up the goad once more, and resumed his way as if nothing had happened.

Hastening back to the village, Mabrûk met 'Ala'd-dîn, who came limping forth to tell him all was ready. In the yard of his father's house he found a donkey standing between two bundles nicely balanced, and Zeynab beside it with the baby in her arms, while his mother and the other women wrung their hands and moaned despairingly. He straightway mounted, and, kicking with both heels, cried, "Yallah!" The donkey ambled forth among the hovels, Zeynab running after in the wake of dust.

Up on the Nile bank, where the woman ran beside, Mabrûk kept glancing over his shoulder in the direction of the town, fearing to behold soldiers. But the groups in sight were all of country people, so far as could be seen for dust;

and after a little he complied with Zeynab's request that they should go more slowly. He now felt safe enough to look forward. The village of Kafr Zeyn had terrors for him, the mere fact of its existence in the world having, since the crime, disturbed his rest of nights, seeming a mute, inexorable witness of his guilt. But the place, when its mud towers came at length in sight, peeping among the leaves like watchmen's libdehs, appeared most pleasant, bosomed as it was in trees and with the coo of doves about it.

Inquiring for his father's friend of those at work in the fields, Mabrûk was told that the Sheykh Abd-ur-Râzic was at that moment mending the nôrag on his threshing-floor. Children, of their own accord, ran on to warn him of the approach of visitors, and long ere the travellers reached the spot among the trees which had been pointed out to them, a noble-looking old man came running to know their will. Mabrûk dismounted with reverence and delivered his father's message, whereupon the sheykh flung formality to the winds, and, embracing the young man, bade him welcome for a year if need be. He led the way into the village to his house, where, giving Zeynab and the baby in charge to the womenfolk, he set meat and drink before Mabrûk with his own hands. Neither then nor afterwards did he ask the cause of the visit, and when Mabrûk of his own will revealed it, he seemed quite indifferent.

The robbery was already forgotten in Kafr

Zeyn, except, perhaps, by the omdeh, who had been flogged for it; which served him right, people said, since he had flogged others with as little justice, and had caused much misery by sending men, the sole support of households, to the military service. What now perturbed the minds of the villagers was the wantonness of some Greeks, khawagât from the town, who, two days ago, had come with guns and destroyed several hundreds of pigeons for pastime merely.

"A pretty pastime, Allah knows!" said Abd-ur-Râzic, with indignation; "to take the life of hundreds of God's creatures for no better reason than that each may boast: 'I killed so many.' If they shot our pigeons on the lands of other villages it would be well, for there they fly scattered, and are counted wild; but here, where they flock to rest, and before our eyes, it is a shame, by Allah! And when we remonstrated with them, they laughed at our beards, and said: 'We have permission from the omdeh.' As if the omdeh had power of life and death among us!"

Mabrûk listened politely to the ceaseless talk concerning pigeons, but still deemed his own affairs the more important. When he walked out among the trees in the cool of the day, his feet seemed drawn magnetically towards the scene of the robbery, and he had much ado to restrain them, for he feared to go there. His imagination pictured the spot as haunted by a vengeful spirit born of the wrong done there, and it seemed to him as if this spirit waited and would sooner or later claim its due from him. But his

constant thought of the place constituted a fascination stronger than his will, and at length one evening, coming in sight of it, and beholding many people unconcerned upon the road, he took his courage in both hands, and walked right past it. Turning, he had the scene which he remembered. It was the same hour. The sunset reddened the palm-trunks, and turned the dust kicked up by wayfarers to a fiery cloud beyond which the trees and pigeon-towers of Kafr Zeyn appeared as a denser cloud of rich deep blue.

With heart in mouth he scanned the place of crime. Here he had fallen on the Syrian, here they had rolled together down the dyke; it seemed the dust of the slope was still disturbed. There was the clump of reeds where the brigands had lain in wait; and there, by the foot of the reeds, lay something shining—a small thing, not much bigger than a snuff-box. He passed the place three times, with eyes furtively intent upon that gaud, ere he dared go down and view it closely; for things of worth are sometimes thus exposed by evil spirits, watchers over hidden treasure, and when one is rash enough to lay hands on them, the rassad seizes him. It was only by devoting his mind to thoughts of civilization and the scepticism of the Franks that he mustered the courage necessary to act upon his soul's prompting; and then, with the thing in his hand, he fled up the bank, as if Gann ibn Gann himself had been at his heels. The evening breeze on the nape of his neck seemed the breath of a devil.

An old man riding an ass overtook him going towards the village, and wished him joy of the evening. The voice made him jump; it brought him back so suddenly to things human. He thrust the thing quickly into his bosom, having seen that it was a cigarette-case.

In the house he examined his find more carefully. It was of silver or the like and nicely made, inscribed with the names "Habîb Lateyf" in Frankish characters.

"It is the name of the Shâmi who was robbed," remarked his host, when it was read to him.

Inside the case were five cigarettes, which, upon inspection proved to be of the best quality. Abd-ur-Râzic accepted one of them, Mabrûk took another, and they smoked in silence, gazing on the silver box.

"In thy place, I should bury it," said Abd-ur-Râzic at length, "for fear it should be used against me."

"By Allah! but that were a pity," said Mabrûk, eyeing it lovingly. "My mind is to keep it until destiny confronts me with the owner."

He could not think of burying the silver box, and yet it irked him to have the thing in his possession, for fear harm should come of it. Would he have felt so irresistibly drawn to revisit that place of sin, would the trinket have lain there unperceived so many days, unless it had been so written on the tables of destiny? The little box was a talisman belonging to his fate for good or ill. Did he cast it into the middle of the river, did he bury it in the depths of the earth,

none the less, he felt assured, it would return to him. He showed it to Zeynab when he went to rest, and she, lighting one of the remaining cigarettes, coolly asked for it to keep some beads in. Mabrûk consented, glad to have it out of his immediate keeping.

Zeynab had but one idea in those days—it was that her husband should find the treasure of Muhammad en-Nûri, and therewith return to the city, to the life she loved. That a treasure existed was clear, she argued, since Muhammad had all his life practised the most lucrative of trades, and yet had never seemed to have much money with him. His wealth was buried somewhere, and, he being dead, it belonged of right to Mabrûk, who had been his bosom friend and partner at the last. Mabrûk rebuked her crossly for such talk. He himself believed in the existence of the treasure, and would have had no objection to appropriate it if found; but there was not the slightest clue to its whereabouts, and he shrank from every reminder of Muhammad's dreadful fate.

Yet on the whole his stay in Kafr Zeyn passed very pleasantly. Every evening there was a gathering in some elder's house, or, as the nights grew warm, upon some threshing-floor beneath the stars, where men told jovial tales of Uncle Abu Nowwâs and Hâg Gohha; where the news of the day, good or bad, was discussed philosophically, with praise to Allah. And Mabrûk was received by all as an honoured guest. When 'Ala'd-dîn, with feet quite healed, appeared one

morning, staff in hand, and told him all was safe for his return, it was with regret that he once more mounted his ass and left behind him the sunlit trees and towers of Kafr Zeyn.

"Thou goest to Tanta, to the Môlid of our lord Ahmed. In sh' Allah, we shall meet thee there in a day or two. Till then may Allah hold thee in safe keeping!" were the parting words of the Sheykh Abd-ur-Râzic, who, with his sons and others of the village, escorted the wayfarers some distance forth among the cornfields. And on arrival at his father's house, Mabrûk heard talk of nothing but the coming Môlid. The pilgrimage from that village was to start betimes on the morrow; such of the fellahîn as were dervishes were furbishing up the badges of their order; the banner of the sainted donkey-driver, inscribed with the belief and sacred monograms, was unfurled and dusted; and in every house there was cooking of provisions for the journey. 'Ala'd-dîn showed Mabrûk a number of fine sweetmeats he had prepared for sale at the fair, hoping thus, with Allah's blessing, to lay the foundations of a petty trade. Mabrûk alone, under Allah, was to be thanked for the opportunity, for without his gracious bounty 'Ala'd-dîn would never have been able to afford the requisite cooking utensils and rich ingredients.

That night Mabrûk's conscience greatly troubled him, because of what remained of the money taken from the Syrian. The Sayyid Ahmed el-Bedawi was a saint renowned through all the world for the righting of wrongs, and especially for his

address in restoring stolen goods to the lawful owners. For a man to visit the shrine of the Father of Consolation with wrongful wealth in his possession would have been foolhardy in the extreme. Zeynab, when consulted, shared his apprehensions. She advised him to leave the gold where it was, buried in a hole in the floor, vowing to distribute it in alms on his safe return. In that way it became no longer his, and at the same time was devoted to a pious use. And, after all, it was improbable that the Sayyid Ahmed, who was a Muslim—none like him—would go to any great trouble on account of a Nazarene. Had the man despoiled been a true believer, it would have been another matter. She herself intended to ask the Sheykh of the Arabs of his kindness to find the treasure of Muhammad en-Nûri for Mabrûk, the rightful heir of that good robber.

Early next morning the start was made. Everyone took care to pass the threshold right foot first, and say, "In the Name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate!" that the religious aspect of the merry-making might be borne in mind. Some of the men, who were dervishes, sported red turbans in honour of the Sayyid Ahmed. The women raised their cries of joy and clapped their hands in measure as the train set forth. Children seated before their parents upon the backs of mules and asses clapped their hands likewise or beat time on little drums. The procession streamed along the Nile bank, raising clouds of dust. In its midst, upon a camel, rode Hâfiz, the blind khatîb,

bearing on high the banner of the sainted donkey-driver, its rich fabric rippling on the breeze. After a little while the banner, growing too heavy for his aged hands, was consigned to a pedestrian, and the zaghârît and clapping ceased awhile, until they came to a village, when once more the joyful noise arose and the banner floated on high from the back of the camel. All who met them blessed their journey; and after the midday halt, they fell in with other like processions, until the long, straight dyke before them seemed alive with people, all moving in one direction, a march of ants across the endless plain. At length, on the horizon, something broke the level. A dome and minarets were seen upon the summit of what seemed a little cloud, but was in truth the kôm of a populous town. At that the multitude cried praise to Allah, and a man with a beautiful voice began to sing:

"Tanta, on thee is light!
In thee a hero bright!
Ya ahl el 'adl.*
Balm to the soul thou art,
Rest to the weary heart!
Ya sâhib fadl!"†

---

* O race (or family) of justice!
† O Lord of Kindness!

CHAPTER XII

The riders dismounted at a temporary khan, one of many erected in the approach to the town, and left the beasts there. Then the party dispersed, the greater number heading straight for the city of tents out in the fields, scene of all kinds of merry-making and of the pious orgies of the dervishes, whither the banner of the Sheykh Selîm was borne with acclamation. Mabrûk, however, with all his father's house, went to the mosque of the Sayyid Ahmed, advancing slowly, at the mercy of the crowd which choked the streets. The great court of the mosque was full to overflowing, and it was some time before the Sheykh Mustafa and his sons could force a passage into the spacious alcove where was the saint's tomb.

From visiting the shrine Mabrûk went out alone to look for 'Ala'd-dîn, who was crying his sweetstuff somewhere in the fair. He had to fight every inch of his way down the main street, lined with stalls, upon which tradesmen sat on high among their wares, invoking the patronage of the Sheykh of the Arabs ; and when at last he won clear of buildings, the concourse and the

clamour grew instead of lessening; for out there in the fields across the railway, land held in mortmain by the saint, canvas tents great and small, booths, wooden stalls, huts and screens covered with matting of palm-fibre, made a second town, about a mile in length, where pleasure in every form was offered cheaply to a pleasure-loving people. It was folly, he soon perceived, to attempt to find one individual in so vast a throng; so he wandered on, content, from show to show, trusting to chance to throw the sweetmeat-seller in his way.

The sunset flamed and died across the flats. The dome and minarets of the Sayyid's mosque blushed pink a space against a turquoise sky, then faded with the world to ashy grey. The outline of the tents grew black. Soon lights shone out here and there, while high over all, upon the summit of the kôm on which the town is built, the minarets of the saint wore rings of flickering fire, and fire ran as a circlet round the base of his dome.

At one moment Mabrûk was deafened by the name of Allah bawled in concert by a moving rank of dervishes; the next he was ogled by a row of tinselled dancing-girls, shaking their breasts upon the stage outside a show-tent, to an accompaniment of târ and darabûkkeh. "In the name of the Sayyid!" cried the water-carriers, giving drink without payment to all who thirsted. "In the name of the Sayyid!" cried the soldiers keeping order, when they beat back the crowd for the passage of some dignitary. "O Sheykh

of the Arabs! O Father of Consolation! O Lord of Kindness!" cried all who yawned, or found themselves at a loss for a word. The very harlots called upon the saint to send them custom.

At length, when it had been some time night, he came to a part of the fair which was not crowded, a wide open space with a high pole in the midst, theatre of the great doings of the dervishes. Here he had to step gingerly to avoid treading upon people who had lain down to sleep upon the trampled ground. Near one end of the square two cressets tossed their flames this way or that as the wind listed, lighting the faces of a circle of onlookers. Within the ring a burly giant flourished a quarter-staff, calling for a man to match him at that weapon. A champion presented himself, but was quickly worsted amid much laughter. Mabrûk then, having nothing else to do, pushed his way into the arena, and had a long staff handed to him.

"Ah, he is brave, this stripling, this young buck. Now see how in a minute I will eat him up!" bellowed the challenger, with a grimace so hideous that all the strength ran out of Mabrûk's limbs. Nevertheless, he managed to go through the formal preliminaries, striking the ground with graceful deliberation, first on the right hand, then on the left, then clashing staves with his opponent in mid-air. The other's face was huge and hairless, bearing many scars; it seemed a devil's in the waving torchlight. All at once it rushed at him with a yell, and Mabrûk sank cowering on the ground, his staff struck clean out of his hand.

His look of terror gave the crowd much merriment. The youth picked himself up at length and retired, laughing; while the victor bellowed, "O who in all the world can conquer me, seeing our lord el-Bedawi strengthens my right arm!"

"Is it thou, O Mabrûk?" said a voice at his elbow as he left the crowd, when, turning, he saw 'Ala'd-dîn. "I was drawn to watch the staff play, and so found thee. I have sold much sweetstuff, the praise to Allah, and given some away for the sake of the Sayyid, and now I have put aside my tray and barrow to seek amusement. Hast seen the tent of the mudirîyeh? There was delicious music before it when I passed just now. Come, let us see!"

He led Mabrûk across the open space and in and out among the tent ropes till they came to a second square, where was much concourse before a large marquee very grandly illuminated. From the tent mouth came strains of heavenly music, of lutes and zithers, cymbals and dulcimers, pipes and drums, blended together cunningly. Mabrûk and his friend drew near and joined the crowd around the musicians, who were seated on the ground in the entrance to the tent. Beyond them, in the presence of the great who lounged within, a man, also cross-legged on the earth, was giving a performance with two cobras. The snakes coiled round his neck, struck their wicked heads into his face, and even licked his lips with their forked tongues, so that the fellahîn who saw it sought refuge in Allah. But the great ones, who reclined within upon couches such as are in

king's palaces, paid no regard to this or to the music, but talked one to another with weary looks. Most of them wore the official tarbûsh, frock-coat, and dark trousers.

"Who are those men?" asked a child held up on a man's shoulder.

"They are some of God's creatures, O beloved," was the scornful answer.

The vulgar herd of spectators formed a half-circle at the open end of the tent. Mabrûk, at one extremity of this crescent, had in full view the faces of men at the other. Suddenly, with a thrill, he became aware of the countenance which had so long haunted him—that of the Syrian whom he had robbed at Kafr Zeyn. Beneath the high red fez it looked white and foreign amid the swarthy, turbaned crowd of fellahîn. Pulling 'Ala'd-dîn's sleeve, he withdrew very hastily.

"May Our Lord protect thee!" exclaimed the sweetmeat-seller, with fervour, when the need for this sudden departure was explained to him. "Let us hasten to the tent of the Shinnawîyeh dervishes, of whom I am the least. There thou art safe, in sh' Allah; for the Shinnawîyeh are the chief order of the Ahmedîyeh, and who would affront our lord Ahmed on the occasion of his Môlid?"

So saying, he led Mabrûk with speed to another marquee, hardly less brilliant than that of the mudirîyeh. Here a zikr was going forward. Some forty professed devotees of the saint, holding hands in a ring round one of the tent-poles, were gasping out the name of Allah, with

sharp nods to right and left and convulsive jerkings of the whole body. 'Ala'd-dîn, leading Mabrûk by the hand, passed by the performers into the heart of the tent, where some old men, richly clad, sat in pleasant converse, enjoying the refreshments which a servant offered.

'Ala'd-dîn kissed the hand of him who sat as host—no less a personage than the Grand Sheykh of the Shinnawîyeh—and the hand of one on his right—one of the learned from the Sayyid's mosque, he informed Mabrûk afterwards in a whisper. Mabrûk followed his example. They then retired to low seats, where refreshment was brought to them.

Seeing one of the zakîrs drop out of the ring, 'Ala'd-dîn sprang up and took his place, and began hurling forth the name of Allah with low bows to right and left. Mabrûk was left sitting alone. He felt secure, in sanctuary, having the name of Allah round about him. He saw in the crowd, which had collected outside the tent to watch the zikr, the baffled forces of his enemy, gnashing their teeth for rage at his escape. His mind had leisure to comprehend the talk of the elders who sat near him.

"Wallahi," said the sheykh from the mosque, with a boding wag of the head, "things go badly in the country nowadays. Men who have come to-day from the capital assure us that the murmurs of the soldiery are on the increase. The impunity of their insolence of three months back planted fear in the hearts of Ahmed Arâbi and his confederates lest Efendîna should but bide his time

and smite them unawares. Every night they meet in the house of Arâbi for counsel how to make their power redoubtable. They have caused to be sent through all the provinces a list of wrongs, asking the notables to put their names to it and support them in demanding just reforms. Multitudes have signed through fear of the power of Arâbi as displayed in the recent mutiny. Ah, it is a pity that our present ruler did not heed the warning of his subtle father, for it is said that Ismaîl, before he went, advised his son to make an end of Ahmed Arâbi and all his friends. But Muhammad Tewfik, in the greatness of his mercy, spared them. However that may be, I pray Allah to avert any serious rebellion, for Efendîna is a Muslim and a man most upright."

"He did wrong to abolish the Dôseh," said the chief of the dervishes, with a dissenting frown.

"As to that, I know not; it is not my business. It has angered you good people out of measure, yet can hardly be considered detrimental to the Faith. We learned deplore rather his concessions to the Franks in the matter of slaves. To suppress the raids in the Sûdân was one thing, but to interfere with our household arrangements is quite another. The Corân enjoins humanity towards slaves, and how can one be humane towards what is not?"

Here Mabrûk could not refrain from putting in a word, but he spoke humbly, with hands hidden in his sleeves and eyes downcast, much in awe of the learning of men who could quote a tradition of the Prophet or his Companions in support of

their lightest statement. From his modern education he had derived no knowledge to compare with theirs, all he had learnt being without Divine authority. He submitted:

"But is it bearable that all the wealth of Masr should pass into the hands of the Frank commissioners?"

"Ah, my son!" replied the sheykh of the mosque, with a pleasant smile. "Is that our business, yours and mine? What share might we, at any time, hope to receive from out the revenues of this region of Masr? It is Efendîna alone who suffers, as heir to his father's debts. The Powers of Europe to-day are the slaves of Jewish usurers who hate the Muslimîn, and Efendîna, by quiet compliance with their demands, hopes in the end to pay them off and rid the land of them, for, in a limited sense, they are just and abide by contracts. Many think that this predominance of the Jews foretells the coming of Antichrist. Allah knows! But it is certain that a rebellion now would give the Franks their opportunity—that, in the name of Efendîna, they would take possession of this province. There can be no gehâd against a properly constituted Muslim authority; such would be mere insurrection, without religious motive or sanction; and the province of Masr, cut off from the rest of El Islâmîyeh, would soon be conquered by the Franks. That is why some people assert that Ahmed Arâbi and his helpers are in the pay of the Europeans. But I am well assured that that is not the case. He is merely a well-intentioned

man, egged on towards he knows not what by the plaudits of the soldiery."

"By the Most High, thou speakest like an angel from Allah," said the aged sheykh of the dervishes when his friend had finished speaking. "Yet must I differ from thee; for not only has Efendîna made mistakes in respect of the Dôseh and the slave-trade, it is also rumoured that he favours free-thinking, and doubts the authenticity of the miracles of the saints."

This was uttered with a sly twinkle of the eyes, as the old man grasped his beard and watched sidelong for the effect of the thrust; for his friend was one of the guardians of the shrine of the Sayyid el-Bedawi, a post which the miracles of the saint made very lucrative.

"Pshaw——" the sheykh of the mosque was beginning; but he saw the trap in time, and changed his tone, continuing in his professional voice:

"There be false miracles, doubtless, fancies of the silly vulgar; but who shall dare to deny that there are true ones? Certainly not we of the house of our lord el-Bedawi, who have daily evidence of the might of his intercession. Hear this, for example:

"A poor Copt of this town, being employed by the priest of his church to cleanse certain vessels of gold which are used in that erroneous worship, was carrying them, wrapped in linen and hidden in his bosom, to his own house, when he was set upon in a lonely place by ruffians, and the vessels were taken from him. The priest, for all the poor man's tears and lamentations, believed that he, and

no other, had stolen the precious vessels, which by that Faith are idolatrously reverenced. He not only beat him soundly, but anathematized him and expelled him from the community. The poor Copt was in despair. He called on all the saints of the Nazarenes, but none heard his prayer. At length he bethought him to invoke the aid of the Sayyid Ahmed el-Bedawi — may Allah accept him!—when straightway, as he walked in the market, he saw the vessels in a certain shop, but soiled so that they seemed not gold. He seized on them and ran, a crowd pursuing, to the church, where the priest received them from him. The merchant roared: 'Ya Muslimîn!' and called for justice; and the priest, demanding nothing better, all went together before the Câdi, who, at the name of the Sayyid el-Bedawi, gave judgment for the Copts; and the merchant named the thieves sooner than lose his right hand. The poor Copt came yesterday to the door of our illustrious mosque, begging to speak with one of the learned. I went out to him, and he told me his story, humbly presenting an offering for the shrine and a trifle of alms for the poor. Who shall doubt thy influence, O Sheykh of the Arabs, seeing the very infidels themselves attest it?"

The zikr was now at an end, and its performers, panting from their exertions, sat or lay upon the ground in groups. They, with all who heard the story, praised Allah for His mercies; but Mabrûk sat blind and dumb, his temples throbbing, in the dazed state of one thrown suddenly off a camel. Till now he had thought

it most unlikely that a Muslim saint would stoop to interfere on behalf of an infidel, but now he beheld in his mind the whole might of the Sheykh of the Arabs arrayed against him. What else could have brought that cursed Syrian to the feast?

Prudence urged him to depart at once from these religious men, servants of the lord Ahmed, who might at any moment be inspired to seize and bind him; or so it seemed to his disturbed intelligence. So, on a word to 'Ala'd-dîn, he took leave of the holy ones, and the twain resumed their wanderings through the streets of the canvas town. Informed of the fresh trouble in his friend's mind, 'Ala'd-dîn strove to reassure him, saying:

"That story has no bearing on thy case. It concerned a man poor and lowly who called upon our lord in his extremity. The poor, even of the infidels, are dear to Allah, for they never forget Him. But thy Shâmi is rich and prideful; he would not call upon our lord. And the Sayyid will take into account thy generosity, the noble gift thou didst make to one poor like me."

'Ala'd-dîn stood still before a flaring tent, where a man with the lungs of a bull called all mankind to view the wisdom of the Franks as displayed in the magnificent Greek circus, the property of one Iskender, where all kinds of miracles were even now being performed. He was for going in, but Mabrûk objected, the trouble in his mind making vain all entertainment. The cries of other showmen, the smiles of plump dancing-girls, failed to allure him. So in the end they supped together

in the street of tents appropriate to the purveyors of rotten fish, and then, forsaking the fair, strolled out on to the open plain, which, after the din and concourse, seemed an empty hall. The piled-up town encroached upon the starry sky. It was all dark save for the illuminations of the Sayyid's mosque, which, beginning to flag, were broken, showing gaps of darkness. Upon a bank beneath an ancient mulberry-tree the two friends named the name of Allah, and lay down to sleep. The night breeze flapped the leaves against the sky, by which it seemed as if the stars kept winking. Wrapped in their cloaks, they hid their faces in their arms, and the noise of the fair died away for them.

CHAPTER XIII

Mabrûk dreamed.

He had stolen some precious vessels from the shrine of the Sayyid Ahmed, and was running with them hidden in his robe, pursued by a yelling mob whose leader was that accursed Syrian. He had gained the open plain and saw hope of escape, when an old man stood and barred the way before him. A pair of bright, stern eyes flashed from beneath the head-dress of the desert Arabs. Those eyes paralyzed him so that he sank helpless, while the hunters fell upon him. They were in act to rend him limb from limb when he awoke.

The town and its sovereign mosque were haloed by the dawn. A pallor hung in the air above the endless plain, still veiled in night, and watched by peaceful stars. 'Ala'd-dîn slept on.

Mabrûk could hardly doubt but that he had had true vision of the Sheykh of the Arabs. In that chill hour of dawn remorse possessed him; he was moved to humble himself at once before his great antagonist. Dedicating his works to Allah, he left 'Ala'd-dîn to his slumbers, and strode towards the town.

On every dry bank and in the lee of every tent men, women, and children lay asleep; the streets themselves were strewn with sleeping forms. Here and there a man sat up and rubbed his eyes, or lifted his hands to heaven. The few who were already afoot stalked in the same direction with Mabrûk, up towards the lofty portal of the Sayyid's mosque.

The shadow on the world was turning blue when Mabrûk passed beneath the ornate gateway into a large cloistered court, where, on common days, the thousand students of the university sat in groups round their instructors. It was now close-packed with fellahîn, who had spent the night there. So great a crowd beset the place of washing that Mabrûk half feared that he would miss the hour of prayer, but he finally succeeded in performing his ablutions, and joined the throng of worshippers that pressed towards the mihrâb just as the sweet voice of the muezzin fell like dew from heaven.

Having prayed, he passed to the shrine of the saint, where the press was again so dense that he had difficulty in getting near enough to touch the tomb with outstretched hand. From all sides came salutations and blessings in terms of passionate love. One old dervish close to Mabrûk waved arms aloft, and extolled the providence of Allah as one inspired.

"We are allowed to visit thee once more, O Sheykh of the Arabs! May Allah take pleasure in thee and save thee, O Father of Consolation! . . . Ho, all who have done evil, come hither,

and behold the boundless mercy of the Most High. Turn now and do good, and in His mercy the good shall outweigh the evil at the last day."

The cry and its message went straight to the heart of Mabrûk, as if the saint himself had uttered it. As a first step in the way of atonement he vowed then and there to become a saccà for three hours in the heat of the day, and pour out cooling drink for all who thirsted, in the name of the Sayyid. Upon that he went forth from the shrine and picked his way among the seated throng in the court, looking for someone of his acquaintance to whom he could impart his vow and so confirm it.

In the cloister walls were many windows with deep ledges, on which some of the fellahîn had deposited their womenfolk and baggage for security. The women, squatting up there, were munching nuts and sweetstuff, and peeping through the gratings at the street without. Mabrûk, taking stock of his surroundings, saw two of the veiled ones making signs to him, and drawing near them, recognized his wife and mother.

"Hast seen thy father, O Mabrûk? He seeks thee. Allah, pity! Calamity has befallen thy brother Rashîd. By the Prophet! he did wrong to leave his wife behind; for last night a friend led him to a place of lewd amusement, the haunt of foreigners, and our dear one was stricken with love for a Nazarene woman, who danced before all men there. He tossed and moaned and called

upon her name through all the night, and now this morning he is very angry and will speak to no one. Perchance thy voice might soothe him, for he loves thee much."

Mabrûk engaged to do what he could to help the sufferer. He was going on to tell the women of his own trouble, when Zeynab produced from her robe the silver box which he had found at Kafr Zeyn. She was proceeding calmly to open it and look for something kept there, when he snatched it from her hand with a malediction. Was his wife mad to bring this memorial of his crime to the shrine of the righter of wrongs? No doubt it was for this the saint was wroth with him.

"Thou art mad thyself," the girl protested, whimpering, in a fright at his sudden vehemence "The box is thy gift to me, and Allah knows it was not stolen, but simply picked up off the common ground. And assuredly our lord Ahmed is not against thee, for he has shown us how to find the treasure of Muhammad en-Nûri. Is it not true, O my mother? These women tell of a Mughrabi in this town, who has not his match in all the world for revealing hidden things. The name of the man and his abode are known to us. Come with us after noon this day, and make trial of his art."

Mabrûk by this was somewhat mollified, yet he still kept hold of the silver case, and it was in his bosom when, a few minutes later, he made his way out of the mosque. He prayed that chance might bring him near his enemy in a public place

that he might thrust the box on him "in the name of the Sayyid," and vanish instantly amid the crowd.

Now, in the early sunlight, the streets were once more filled from wall to wall. From the steps of the mosque the heads appeared as thick in motion as the sand in an hour-glass. Mabrûk was putting on his slippers before the door when he caught sight of 'Ala'd-dîn and his own father among the inflowing throng.

"Praise to Allah, at last I find thee," cried the Sheykh Mustafa. "Rashîd thy brother is quite mad, the poor one! A girl has snatched his wits away. I have reasoned with him, but to no purpose. Come now and see what thou canst do."

He turned back from entering the mosque, and shouldered his way across the street to the mouth of an alley, where was much less concourse. Here the three were able to walk abreast and look about them at the shops on either hand, whose owners strove to entice them in the name of the Sayyid. A little boy ran after Mabrûk, and clutching the hem of his robe, made graceful reverence. "In the name of the Sayyid," he lisped, and thrust a rose into the young man's hand, making off as swiftly as he had come.

From this alley of shops they turned into a lane quite empty, and came at length to a small open space where one of the mud-built houses had fallen down or been demolished. Here, on a heap of rubbish, sat the luckless Rashîd, watched by a little group of young companions. The new arrivals joined this band

of sympathizers. They called on Allah to relieve the dear one, and in a gentle, indirect way tried to engage his attention. But he gave no heed at all to them. He sighed and groaned and rocked himself, giving utterance, from time to time, to passionate words.

"O my sweet, did I ever wrong thee that thou hast dealt me such a wound? Veil thy face, I tell thee; in mercy, veil it! It is a sin for thee to kill men with such loveliness. . . . Thou dancest very badly, O my soul; not a daughter of the country but has more dexterity; and yet methinks the black-eyed maids dance thus in paradise. . . . I looked upon the sun in splendour, and that image is a seal upon my eyes for ever. I am blind, and wander groping. Where is the beloved? O Sheykh of the Arabs, lead me to her abode, and incline her heart to pity, that she drive me not away unsatisfied. O Helweh! Helweh! Helweh!"

"O Lord of the Worlds!" moaned the youths who heard him. "His disease is catching. We also burn with love. O Sheykh of the Arabs! O Helweh! Helweh!"

"Her name, it seems, is Helweh," whispered the Sheykh Mustafa in Mabrûk's ear. "She is one of those who flock hither from Esh Shâm to make money by infatuating the rich Turks and khawagât. Alas! she sets upon her favours a price beyond the reach of common men, else might Rashîd have peace."

Mabrûk, who loved his brother, sat watching him sadly. The space of rubbish-heaps and the

surrounding walls of houses were mud-coloured, which made the jewel sky more brilliant, like a bright eye in a face dry and withered. All at once, hearing Rashîd cry out, "O Sheykh of the Arabs!" a hope occurred to him. He took up the cry.

"O Sheykh of the Arabs! In thy name I give drink to the thirsty this day at noon. Let Rashîd become the partner of my toil, that so, by thy merit, in sh' Allah, he may win his dear."

Rashîd leaned towards the speaker, smiling as though he heard sweet music. Slowly the dull look vanished from his face.

"Thou sayest well," he murmured. "We will toil together through the heat, and afterwards, when night arrives, thou shalt come with me to the scene of my misfortune. Call it a bargain, O my soul!"

All who sat by praised Allah for his swift recovery. He rose, and submitted to be led to a tavern, to eat and drink a little in preparation for the task before him; while 'Ala'd-dîn, who knew all the ins and outs of the fair, went off to hire the necessary outfit for them.

In the heat of the day the two young men, each with a jar of cooling drink upon his back, moved here and there amid the multitude, clashing two cups together and shouting: "O ye thirsty!" Out among the tents, where the air was thick with dust, at an hour when the heat of the sun made all things colourless, they bore their heavy burdens, bowing to the request of the poorest, so that a jet of lemon-flavoured drink poured

over the shoulder into one of the cups; and Mabrûk felt happy in the pious business, sure that the Syrian had no power to hurt him. He wished that the accursed one would appear before him, craving drink, that, with the liquor, he might give to him the cigarette-case, and so be rid of obligation towards him.

Not until the second hour after noon did the brethren desist from their task of mercy, and, having restored their vessels to the owner, return with aching backs to the tavern whence they had set out. There Rashîd, who had not closed his eyes that night, threw himself upon the ground and went to sleep. Mabrûk was thinking to follow his example, when he became conscious of the gaze of someone passing in the street without. In the torpid state of his intelligence it was quite a minute ere he realized it was the Syrian, and by that time the man was gone. Mabrûk gave chase, thinking here was his opportunity to give back the silver box; but the man was not in sight, and at the street-end moved a crowd in which it had been hopeless to seek for him. He returned to the tavern, feeling in his garment for the case, but it was gone. At first dismay was his one sensation on this discovery, but presently, upon reflection, he gave praise to Allah. Perhaps the Sayyid Ahmed, in consideration of his great repentance, had himself relieved him of the tiresome charge. Perhaps it had been miraculously transferred to the rightful owner. He prayed that it might be so.

Returned to the tavern, he had flung himself

down to rest beside Rashîd, when the voices of his mother and Zeynab struck his ear. Their veiled forms darkened the entry. They asked if he was minded to consult the wise Mughrabi concerning the treasure of Muhammad en-Nûri. He replied, "In the name of Allah!" and went with them.

Guided by a small boy, they threaded tortuous byways of the town, where nothing broke the monotony of mud-built walls save here and there a little whitewashed shrine, or the ornamented gateway of some lesser mosque. In a blind alley they knocked at a low door, which was the solitary feature of a high brown wall. A deep voice with a foreign intonation bade them enter Their guide forsook them suddenly, and fled.

CHAPTER XIV

The room within seemed so dark that the women instinctively murmured: "Your permission, blessed ones!" as one says when entering a place where demons dwell. But as their eyes forgot the sunlight they saw that it got some light through a doorway from a room behind. The same voice which had before addressed them came again from that inner sanctum, and, passing to it, they were met by the magician, who seemed to have just risen from a bed upon the floor, of which the coverings were all disordered.

He was a tall, gaunt man of middle age, lean-jowled, and of a copper complexion. His eyes, too close to a large aquiline nose, conveyed a sinister impression which the excessive blandness of his smile seemed designed to correct. His turban—a very deep one—and the robe he wore were made of rich material, but old and dirty. His legs and feet were bare and copper-coloured like his face.

The women talking volubly, Mabrûk had time to look about him. Besides the bed already mentioned, there was a brazier in a corner, with vessels of strange shape upon the floor around it.

What light there was to see by entered through wide cracks in the wooden shutter closing a window, which gave upon another street, apparently, for voices and passing footsteps were heard beyond it.

"Can you tell me in what neighbourhood the treasure was buried?" inquired the sorcerer. "Did I know that, I could, for a payment, perambulate the region and, in sh' Allah, locate it by means of the divining-wand. That is the simplest method and the surest. . . . Ah, thou sayest truth, O veiled one! It is a course which would involve some risks of publicity. . . . Thou wouldst know the secret of the matter here and now? Thou askest: Is it possible? I reply: It is possible, since the owner of the wealth is dead. Were he in life, no power on earth could compass it. But I warn you, this will come much dearer than the simpler method. This noble youth is the rightful heir, you say? Without a doubt he will give much for possession of the inheritance."

"I will give thee a tithe of the treasure," said Mabrûk lavishly.

The wizard shook his head, and cunning crept into his ceaseless smile. He said: "Not so, by Allah! The price must be paid beforehand, which means—now. Without it I will not embark upon the business, which is arduous and, I warn you, rather terrible. That is my last word. Now, how much wilt thou give?"

At that there were lively protests from the women. It was not right to pay for work till

work was done. The warlock only enlarged his knowing smile, and repeated: "It is my last word."

At length the mother of Mabrûk, who had come provided with money for the purpose, made a bid which the wizard repelled with indignation, and the bargaining began in earnest. Mabrûk, less greedy for the treasure, left the adjustment of preliminaries to the women, and sat by, brooding on his own perplexities. The silver case might have been stolen from his person, or he might have dropped it. In any case he could not divest his mind of a sense that there was something miraculous in its disappearance at this juncture, nor yet decide whether the accident was ominous of good or evil.

Matters were finally arranged, and the wizard, in possession of the money, warned his suppliants that their courage was about to be tried to the utmost.

He then cried: "O Daûd!" and clapped his hands, when a small boy appeared so suddenly from the dark ante-room that to Mabrûk and the women he seemed to spring out of the ground.

"Make all things ready for the greater magic!"

The boy Daûd first stopped up the cracks in the shutter with rags and dry dung; then he pulled the brazier out into the middle of the room. He knelt awhile and blew its embers to a glow, then brought a chafing-dish and an array of phials. The sorcerer took seat behind the brazier.

"Let no one name the name of Power!" he

cried in a harsh voice, and added to the boy: "Take the rose from his hand!"

Mabrûk was not aware that he had been smelling at the rose which had been presented to him that morning in the name of the Sayyid, till Dâud, with an imploring gesture, took it from him; but, curiously, the moment it was gone he missed it greatly, and felt that he had lost his last support. The boy had returned to his master's side. At a word from the magician he took up one of the phials and the chafing-dish, and flung what seemed fine dust upon the brazier. A cloud of thick white smoke went up and spread throughout the room.

The wizard muttered a long incantation, of which Mabrûk could not catch a word. From time to time he interrupted himself to breathe a word to the boy, who thereupon mixed fresh powders on the chafing-dish and cast them on the fire. Each time a puff of perfumed smoke arose, until the air of the room was dense with it, and Mabrûk's head swam with the potent fumes.

The walls of the room had vanished. At one minute it seemed they were in the desert, home of all enchantments, the next that they were seated on a magic carpet travelling through the air at lightning speed. The shrouded forms of the two women sitting with their backs towards him, the crouching shape of the wizard whose face, in the glow of the brazier, was at moments hidden by the gush of smoke, the boy erect and moving silently—all seemed to be rushing onward towards some land unknown. He now knew

what was coming—a thing most awful, and, no doubt, a sin. He had looked for a display of second sight, some trick of divination, and behold him seated at a show of necromancy. The fear he had felt at sight of the Syrian was as nothing to this. He heard the name of the dead robber called three times by the magician. The whole group now seemed to be travelling at a frightful speed, the smoke whirling round them. An unearthly cry went up. The earth split open in their midst, and out of the fissure rose vague shapes with sounds of fear. One of the spectres drew Mabrûk's gaze. Slowly it condensed, the others fading. The figure of a man in Frankish clothes, with fez pushed back carelessly, the phantom stared at Mabrûk. It was the Syrian, in the same posture in which he had passed the tavern an hour before. Mabrûk knew no more till he awoke to find the room made light once more, the women weeping, the magician bending over him, applying restoratives.

"Dost fear the dead, O my son?" he asked, with his cunning smile.

"I saw no dead," Mabrûk shuddered; "but the likeness of a living man, my enemy."

"A strange thing!" frowned the wizard, in real perplexity. "It must be that thou hadst that face in mind. Did I not bid thee think on him we named?" His tone became suddenly wrathful. "Allah destroy thy house, O son of a dog! Darest thou mock the enchanter and those who deign to serve him? The spell failed through thy fault. No form appeared distinctly. Get thee

gone, O pig, lest I call all the underground folk to rend thee limb from limb! And you women, also, in safety go!"

The women and Mabrûk professed their respect for his great powers and their perfect innocence of any wish to anger him. But the necromancer would not be appeased. With angry words he drove them from his house, and they went forth shamed into the sunlit alley, feeling as if they had robbed him, though he had their money.

CHAPTER XV

Mabrûk inhaled great breaths of the outer air, but it was long ere he could purge his throat and nostrils of the necromancer's fumes or his mind of the shadow of that ghastly scene. Having escorted his mother and his wife as far as the gateway of the Sayyid's mosque, he returned to the tavern where he had left Rashîd asleep, to find it a centre of some excitement.

A young fellâh, with his hands bound, seated on the ground between two soldiers was sending out his voice in wild appeal to the passers-by, some of whom stopped out of curiosity, forming a little crowd.

"What is there?" Mabrûk inquired of one of these inquisitives. The answer came on a shrug:

"That poor young man, it seems, was chosen by the omdeh of his village to serve in the army; but he escaped by flight. Now the omdeh, who is his enemy, has seized him here at the Môlid, and delivered him up to these soldiers, who will take him presently to el-Câhireh. It is said there is a plot among the omdehs, and that other poor, righteous men are like to be kidnapped ere the

feast is done. By the Prophet, it is an insult to the Sayyid; it is for the learned to denounce such wickedness."

"Ya Muslimîn! Help! Save me, for the love of Allah!" cried the captured youth. "It is by injustice that I was chosen in the first place. The omdeh is my enemy—a wicked man. My father is dead. My mother and five little ones look to me for support; yet that devil picked me out for the army. My petition was lodged at the mudirîyeh, yet he has caused me to be seized, as it were in the very sanctuary of our lord el-Bedawi! I may be sent to the land of devils, to the horrid Sûdân, unless, in the mercy of Allah, I can find a substitute. O true believers, is there not one among you who will redeem an ill-used man? Behold, my mother is a widow, and will be destitute. What can she do alone with five quite little ones? O Sheykh of the Arabs! Is justice nowhere to be found? Is the race of the generous quite extinct among us?"

The spectators murmured of pity. By Allah, here was an ill-used man, none more so, yet no one felt a call to be ill-used instead of him.

"Oh, surely in all the hundreds of thousands gathered hither to the Môlid of our lord Ahmed, there will be found one generous!"

At that the foremost of the crowd exclaimed:

"Allah knows! Perhaps that is so. In sh' Allah, thou wilt chance on such an one."

"By Allah, he does wrong to make such moan," cried one of the soldiers, a little nettled by the crowd's compassion. "To hear him complain

one would think he was leaving his mother outcast, like our lady Hagar, instead of in a village full of her relations. And as for the portion of soldiers, it is better than that of the fellahîn, since Ahmed Arâbi—may Allah guard him!—is become our spokesman. The rulers hear our voice and obey our judgments. Efendîna himself is forced to show us favour. After a little, in sh' Allah, a gehâd will be proclaimed, and we shall sweep the dirty Franks into the sea. Then every soldier-man will be a lord in the province of Masr—Arâbi Bey, our friend, will see to that."

Mabrûk, growing tired of the dispute, pushed his way into the coffee-house, and inquired of the proprietor for his brother Rashîd. The taverner, with a merry grin, pointed to the floor near the feet of one of the soldiers. Rashîd lay there asleep upon his arm, just as Mabrûk had left him. He had slept through all the outcry of the hapless conscript.

Mabrûk would not arouse him. He ordered a mess of boiled beans, and cleaned out the dish then entered into conversation with the soldiers and their disconsolate charge. The latter still kept entreating passers-by to provide a substitute. Mabrûk joined the warders in jeers at his infatuation.

"Wallahi, let him find his substitute if he can," said one of them. "We, for our part, have nought to say against it. Perhaps we had better send a crier crying through the fair this cry: 'In the name of the Sayyid. Whoever loves to do a gracious deed, let him come forward and take the

place of a poor young man who has been selected unjustly for the military service.' If he offered money, it were another matter. For a good round sum of money he could have a thousand offers.

The youth turned fiercely on the speaker, saying:

"Thou knowest well I have no money. Thou seest my sad plight, yet mockest me. Thou devil! May Allah blast thee!"

"Now bless the Prophet, and retract thy curse. It is wrong for thee to get so very angry. Find thy generous man, since thou art set on it, and peace to thee. There is time enough, for other runaways have to be captured, and it is unlikely we shall start before the morning."

Then it was sunset. In the third hour of the night Rashîd heaved a deep sigh, and his eyes opened.

"O Mabrûk, is it thou?" he said, and, raising his head upon his hand, he yawned capaciously. Regaining fuller consciousness, he asked: "What hour is it?" and, when informed, would hardly stop to eat the food which the tavern-keeper, at Mabrûk's command, made haste to set before him He whispered: "Thou wilt see her, O my dear, and lucky thou! But Allah save thee from such pangs as I now suffer."

As soon as he had eaten a little, they went out hand in hand, Rashîd discoursing of his love with frequent sighs, and the soldiers, who had heard the story from the taverner, rallied them good-humouredly as they set forth. Passing by the

central mosque, round which the throng had dwindled to some sauntering groups, they made their way through dim bazaars to a part of the town till then unknown to Mabrûk—a quarter down by the canal, where a number of the shops were still open, and half of the people in the streets wore Frankish clothes beneath the fez. Here Rashîd, struck speechless, dragged him to a lighted entry. A man of rude address, with the bleating Beyrût accent, demanded the price of admission, and, when they had paid it, gave no further heed to them. Rashîd holding his brother's hand as in a vice, they passed in to what, for both of them, was a scene of marvellous brilliance.

CHAPTER XVI

A PIECE of waste land, bounded on three sides by blind walls, had been roofed temporarily with matting supported on wooden poles. Screens of the same material were so disposed as to shut out all view from the street, while leaving a passage for those who paid to enter. Lamps hung from pieces of wood nailed crosswise to the posts which upheld the awning, and a string of paper lanterns swung above a platform at the far end. On a couch at the back of this stage lounged a dozen girls, Syrian and Jewish by their types of countenance, with flowers in their hair, and clad in gowns whose fashion aped the Frankish. On either side, a row against the wall, sat the musicians, cross-legged on the boards. The rest of the enclosure was set about with stools and small tables, at which a number of men sat smoking and drinking coffee or less lawful drinks.

Rashîd, keeping tight hold of Mabrûk's hand, led the way to the front, and chose a vacant table close to the stage. Here, in their white turbans and long black cloaks, the brethren sat alone among men in the high-crowned fez and European garments; others of the fellahîn, abashed at enter-

ing a place so vicious, having chosen seats as near as possible to the exit.

"Is it not a splendid place?" said Rashîd, with eyes feverishly bright. He looked at his brother or else down at the floor, powerless to bring his eyes to bear upon the stage and its inhabitants, whose near neighbourhood burned him like fire.

A girl with a clear-cut Jewish face devoid of softness was singing a love-song—very badly, it appeared to Mabrûk, who had heard real singers in the capital. It was done in a way that suggested the cold, methodical music of the Franks, without subtlety as without invention. But Rashîd vibrated passionately to every word and note, the love that held his soul enforcing them.

"Dost behold her face?" he whispered. "O Helweh! O my life!" He kept his shoulder towards the stage, nor had Mabrûk yet seen him glance in that direction; yet he continued: "She is seated third in order from that fat one on thy right. See how content she looks, how cruel, wanting nothing! She leans back, smiling, complete in beauty. . . . O Sheykh of the Arabs! Knows she what love is? Can she give her soul to one, yet go unveiled? . . . O Allah, make her discontented! Give her but a small desire to mate with mine! O Lord, let me kill her lover if she has one!"

Rashîd's voice was rising, attracting undesirable notice among the fashionables. Mabrûk, whose mind had assumed urbanity on entering such a place as naturally as one puts on woe at a funeral,

strove hard to silence him, pointing out that the girl was a harlot undeserving of these raptures, that the place was public and disreputable. But Rashîd would not be calmed, and in his secret soul Mabrûk acknowledged some intoxicating charm in their surroundings. The scene recalled his old poetic cult of civilization, reviving memories of Sharlas and Kamîl.

They had ordered coffee of a man who asked for their commands, and Rashîd, having emptied his cup, called for another, deaf to all dissuasion. He grew visibly more excited, and now stared fixedly at the stage. Mabrûk, following his gaze, for the first time took note of the woman. She appeared in the bloom of youth, and looked demure as, leaning back on the couch, she trifled with her bracelets. When it came to her turn to perform, she got up slowly, and bestowed on her companions a shrug and a smile expressive of reluctance. Her grace in movement was enhanced by shyness. Coming to the front of the stage, she stood still a moment, hesitating, with eyes averted, as if ashamed to face so many eyes. Some of the fashionables hailed her loudly by name, and flung jokes at her with disrespectful mirth. The eyes of Rashîd flashed round a moment murderously, then returned to their devotions.

The music broke into a dancing measure, to which the players with their voices added the traditional Kurdish refrain; and she began to dance, or rather move about the stage, advancing and shrinking like a timid child, her arms extended, on her lips an appealing smile. It was a poor

travesty of the ancient dance, but Mabrûk, scarcely less than Rashîd, was ravished by it. Her hesitation, her awkwardness were so refined! Just so, he thought, would the incomparable Kamîl have borne herself if compelled by an unkind fate to dance in public.

The transports of Rashîd found vent in prayers to Allah. He called her his own eyes, his very soul, and begged her to come down at once and save his life, in a way to provoke a smile from the most courtly. The burst of laughter all around him humiliated Mabrûk.

The lover called for a third cup of coffee, though Mabrûk reminded him of the adage, "The third for the sword."

"For the sword be it!" said Rashîd, with exultation. "O Allah, send to me a sword this minute!"

Mabrûk could only invoke the Sheykh esh Shadili, patron of coffee-drinkers, and trust in Allah for his brother's safety.

The girl, her performance over, came round among the tables with a saucer in her hand, collecting money. Rashîd having dropped a silver coin into the dish, would fain have detained her at his side a minute; but she slipped from his grasp as glibly as a lizard, and with a laugh back at him pursued her way, leaving behind her a perfume in which he basked. Presently he caught sight of her sitting at a table with some men, infidels by the looks of them. In a fury he bade his brother look, but Mabrûk would not turn his head, fearing to meet

the stares which he felt sure were being aimed at him. He managed to prevent his brother from calling for more coffee, which at one moment he seemed bent on doing, and at length, to his own great relief, succeeded in persuading him to quit the shameful scene. Rashîd, however, would insist on passing close to the place where Helweh sat, which was not in their direct way out, and on saying good-night to the girl with a scowl at her companions. Helweh laughed contemptuously. One of those unbelievers who sat with her made a rude remark as the brothers moved away, in which the words "stinking fellahîn" were plainly audible. It was all that Mabrûk could do to restrain his brother from returning to drink the blood of the foul-mouthed heathen Rashîd the peacemaker, gentlest and most benign of creatures, was by the poison of love transformed into a raging lion.

CHAPTER XVII

The street without seemed still pretty busy, though it was long past midnight. Mabrûk looked up with thanksgiving at the quiet stars and yawned luxuriously. Now that his nerves were relieved of the strain which his brother's conduct of the last four hours had laid upon them, he became suddenly aware that he was very tired. Taking Rashîd's hand, he proposed that they should straightway find some nook and go to sleep. But the demented one still listened for the sounds of music, for the talk and laughter, at present muted in their ears; he refused to leave behind that place of sin, but kept walking up and down before the entry, deaf to all remonstrance.

'Go thou and sleep since thou art weary. For me it is not to be thought of. The turmoil in my soul forbids it. Leave me! Go, I say!" he murmured crossly.

But Mabrûk would not forsake him, so they walked up and down together for what seemed an age, the street growing ever more deserted. The monotony of the exercise was soporific. Mabrûk kept losing consciousness, and awaking to hear his brother's frenzied mutterings.

Out of one of these fits of slumber he was startled by shrill screams. Rashîd was gone from his side; he woke in earnest. By the light of a lantern hanging at the entrance to the place of entertainment he beheld a struggle of two men —a turban and long robe contending with a fez and Frankish suit. He flew to the spot. A woman who had shrunk back to the entry clutched at him as he passed, imploring him, with chattering teeth, to save her brother. It was Helweh, her finery hidden in a long black cloak and hood. He broke from her and caught his brother's arm, imploring him to bless the Prophet, to desist, to fly at once; but he only got involved in the struggle, and received some blows for his pains. Yet he persevered in vain attempts to part the combatants till they were sundered effectually, the watch surrounding them. Two men had much ado to overpower Rashîd, while one sufficed to hold both his adversary and Mabrûk. Men seemed to spring up out of the ground, for in the twinkling of an eye it seemed a crowd was round them. The girl Helweh ran from one to another of the watchmen as one distraught, clutching their robes, imploring them to release her brother.

"By Allah, it is not his fault, the poor one. We came forth peaceably to return to the house, when these two wicked persons fell upon him for no reason, unless because we are Nazarenes. Our Lord knows the iniquity of the men of Masr. O Allah, shield us from their cruel fanaticism! Think not, because we are Nazarenes, that we

lack protection. My brother is the agent of a rich Greek, a great one, and the Greek Consul will certainly see his wrongs avenged. Let him go, I pray! For the love of Allah, let him come with me! How can I go alone by night in a strange city? I swear to you by the Gospel he has done no wrong."

But the watchmen would not give way. She offered money, but they refused it. Her ill-judged mention of the consul had put them on their best behaviour, and lifted the whole affair out of the category of those that can be treated pleasantly. Their leader assured the girl that her brother would suffer no hardship, but simply be detained in custody until the morning, when he would be asked to tell his tale before the Câdi.

"Is it in truth her brother?" murmured Rashîd distractedly.

The watchmen waited a little, not unmoved by the girl's complaints, for she was comely; but a second mention of the consul threw them back upon the regulations, and their sheykh gave command to lead on. Then, as the guard between them moved obediently, Mabrûk caught sight of the face of his fellow-prisoner, turned in anguish towards the girl. He could not repress a cry.

"What ails thee?" asked the guard who held his wrist.

It was the face which had pursued him since last evening, the same which had appeared to him in the wizard's den, the face of the man

whom he had robbed at Kafr Zeyn. The Sheykh of the Arabs had so willed it. All was said. It was from Allah.

But as they were led through the deserted streets resignation gave way to terror in Mabrûk's mind. He saw the whole extent of his danger if confronted with this man in daylight before the Câdi. Rashîd had little to fear, since he had sinned in the madness of his love, and not for gain. All men, for pity, would condone his fault; but for himself he would, perhaps, be hanged like Muhammad en-Nûri. At the thought despair endowed him with a strength and courage not his own.

In passing by the entrance of a dark side alley, talking amicably with his captor, he gave a sudden wrench, a blow, and ran for his life. From the outcry which ensued behind him he learnt that the other two prisoners had taken advantage of the surprise to break away. His strained ears caught no sound of steps pursuing, the shouts seemed rather to recede from him; nevertheless, he continued to run with all his might till he came to the bank of the canal. There, finding the coast quite clear, he paused to recover breath and look about him. At a little distance was a large Nile barque moored to the bank, the first of a row, extending to the distant bridge, with masts and furled sails dimly seen against the stars. Neither light nor sound came from it; it seemed uninhabited; and, deeming it as good a hiding-place as man could wish, he drew near and stepped on board. But on the

instant a dark form rose before him, and, naming the Holy Name, inquired: "Who art thou?" Mabrûk, who had just then no wits to reason, terrified by the apparition, sprang back on to the shore and ran once more for his life, till he was lost in the mazy alleys of the town, dogs snarling at his heels. Of a sudden, close before him, he saw the lofty walls of the Sayyid Ahmed's mosque. His mother and his wife were sleeping within those walls. He would have liked to go and rouse them to take counsel, but dared not, since the Sayyid was against him. At a loss what next to do, he cried to Allah. Then suddenly he remembered the poor conscript in the tavern who had prayed some generous man to be his substitute. If only it were not too late!

There was still a light in the tavern—two wicks burning in a saucer of oil set on a stool gave light to the soldiers who were playing backgammon. The prisoner lay asleep on the floor at their feet.

"Merciful Allah!" they exclaimed at sight of Mabrûk. "Art thou, then, a watcher like to us?"

"The cry of that ill-used man has brought me to you at this hour. Deign to accept me as his substitute!" gasped the hunted youth.

"In good luck, O my dear!" replied the elder of the two. "Loose the cord from the wrists of that squealer, if thou canst do so without waking him. At last he is tired out, the praise to Allah!" Holding up the light, he eyed Mabrûk. "Hast killed a man, or what? Nay, be not angry.

Who am I to blame thee? None join us willingly save such as flee from justice or oppression; and the disorder of thy looks betrays thee. Lie down on the floor here; pull this cloak well over thee. None will look for thee here. In an hour or two, in sh' Allah, we start for Masr on the iron road."

CHAPTER XVIII

About the fifth hour of the day, when the sun shone with full strength, Mabrûk trode once more the streets of the Victorious City, as one of a group of conscripts under escort; and the contrast of his present ignominious position with that of a student in the School of Medicine put dust and ashes in his mouth. From being examined with the rest at Casr-en-Nîl he was marched, with five companions in misfortune, towards the Abdîn barracks. He had seen no one of his friends ere leaving Tanta. His wife, his parents, would seek for him in vain, and mourn loudly, thinking him dead. Nor would their grief be much diminished when they knew his fate; for what was the military service save a living death? Sometimes, after years, men returned thence to their homes; but they were still soldiers at the beck and call of the Government, such temporary release being a mere excuse for not paying them.

He observed the soldiers marching near him. In their tight-fitting clothes they walked like nothing human, with stiff legs keeping step, bellies in as when one holds his breath, and faces bright with conscious pride in the achievement. Even allowing for the lapse of months and years,

Mabrûk could not believe that he would ever grow content, as these men seemed, with that life of bridled steeds, of herded sheep.

Leaving behind the spacious streets of the modern quarter, they threaded a maze of alleys teeming with careless life, where full dogs slept by the foot of the walls, and every doorway breathed forth homely smells. Some of the conscripts had begun to weep anew, when they emerged upon a vast meydân, surrounded by great dull buildings on a foreign pattern. Here a band was playing, while soldiers moved about coherently, fifties and hundreds of them appearing in their evolutions only as slabs and slices from a general mass. On one side were the barracks, with countless windows fixed in perpetual admiration of the Khedive's palace facing them across the square, the barrack-yard being cut off from the meydân by long iron bars set upright in the coping of a low wall. Once behind those bars, the conscripts became the butt of some lounging soldiers, who, for some reason or other, were excused from drill. They were fair game, being known for poor runaways, men who had relied on their own cleverness to escape the common fate, and had failed. One merry man caught Mabrûk by the arm, and, calling him "uncle," turned him round to get a look at his face.

"Have a care!" cried the ombashi who had been at Tanta. "That one is not like the rest, a blubberer. By the Prophet, he is no other than a devourer of men, a blood-drinker. He is here of his own free will."

At that the would-be joker fell back dismayed. The ombashi whispered in his ear significantly. He in his turn whispered to the other idlers, who all began to make friendly overtures to Mabrûk, one asking to know his name and origin, another offering a cigarette. They all shrank away at the approach of a high officer, but gathered round Mabrûk again indoors, after the formalities attending the reception of the conscripts had been completed, and pointed him out to their comrades who poured in from drill.

"Wallahi, is the young man tired of life already, that he joins of his own free will?" cried one and another, subsiding on their heels to gaze their fill at the phenomenon. But, on a whisper from the showmen, they praised Allah for His mercies, and stared at Mabrûk with still closer interest. The youth then learnt that he was taken for a dare-devil, the ombashi from Tanta having told them he had killed a man. Perceiving bravery to be required of him, he allowed the imputation, and, when called upon for an anecdote, embroidered freely on his recollections of Muhammad en-Nûri, making it appear that he had killed not one man only, and had robbed and beaten more than he could count. His hearers vowed by Allah so brave a youth was wasted in the army, where personal valour must give place to discipline.

"Here, in the town, it is bearable," sighed one. "But—O Protector!—suppose they send us to the accursed Sûdân!"

At that ghastly suggestion all sought refuge in

Allah, and fell a prey, it seemed, to sudden tooth-ache.

"Nevertheless," remarked another, "thou art come at a fortunate time, for since the Frank commissioners have got control of the finances, our wages are paid more regularly. And after a little, in sh' Allah, Ahmed Arâbi, the dear one, will persuade Efendîna to dismiss all the Turkish, Arnaût and Circassian officers who make our life a burden, and to drive the Franks into the sea, and will cause every soldier to be treated as a king in Masr."

"In sh' Allah! In sh' Allah!" cried the rest in concert. "And the officers who are sons of the country will be forbidden to beat our faces with their canes, and flogging will be abolished. Then we shall be kings indeed."

This friendliness of the old inhabitants made the first days in barracks tolerable for Mabrûk. With other new-comers, he was cursed and roughly handled by the drill-instructor; but when he came in, smarting all over from strokes of the cane, horrified and angry at such indignities, he escaped the jests and horseplay reserved for others, his contemporaries. And after a week or two, when he had learnt all the exercises and came to take a pride in their performance, he was not unhappy. His comrades were, for the most part, good, light-hearted men, careless so long as they had food to eat and tobacco to smoke—men who could sing a good song and tell a good story; and many an hour was spent in pleasant converse. Indeed, the life in barracks would have been quite

desirable, as compared with the fortune of mankind in general, had all who held command been natives of the country. The Egyptian officers showed no more than that natural arrogance which everyone must feel who has men under him. They used their canes upon the men, but in reason, and were not above a civil word in private. It was the Turks, and still more the Circassians and Albanians, who were hated. For them the men were all mere dogs and swine; and they did not disguise their contempt for every son of the Nile, whether officer or private. "A fellâh has no shame," was a proverb they were always quoting; and in their eyes all the people of Egypt, including townsmen, were fellahîn.

It was as the spokesman of the native officers against the overweening arrogance and occasional brutality of such oppressors that Ahmed Arâbi, called the peasant-soldier, had gained the good word of the whole army; and Mabrûk heard his name invoked by men ill-used as often as that of his sainted namesake, the Sayyid el-Bedawi.

Among the officers with whom Mabrûk came in contact was one Amîn Bey, a Circassian, a swaggering, drink-loving brute, who knew no fear. This man one night, when in his cups, chased the soldiers in the corridors with drawn sword, for mere pleasure of seeing them run, calling out that he would defile the mouths of all the dastardly Egyptians, the accursed spawn of Pharaoh. This being the besotted brute barbarian's idea of fun, many were the plots to slay him hatched in whispers, and it

was all Mabrûk could do to resist the honour thrust on him of being the murderer, for, since he had already done some killing, assassination, it was argued, might be called his business.

"Why does he call us misbegotten sons of Pharaoh?" the men wailed. "We are Muslimîn, and have nothing to do with Pharaoh, who at the beginning of the world was a sorcerer and the worst of infidels. Why talk of the men of Masr as if they were a tribe, a separate people? Is a man less a Muslim because it was ordained that he should be born on the banks of the Nile, and are not all the Muslimîn alike brothers? Are we Copts to be thus treated as the seed of Pharaoh? It is very impolite to talk as he does. By Allah, if Efendîna could be shown the way he treats us, His Highness would be very angry, and would stop his mouth with dirt. O Ahmed Arâbi, thou friend under Allah of poor, righteous soldiers, take our cause in hand!"

On the first occasion when he was permitted to walk alone in the city Mabrûk bought reeds and ink and paper, that he might write to his father. On his return, he was sitting on the shady side of the barrack-yard, shaping one of the reeds with a knife, when a comrade, observing his occupation, gave tongue, and summoned others to the sight.

"Thou canst write, O Mabrûk? Thou canst write true Arabic? O blessed thou! Now it is known for certain that thou art the son of a good house, as we always suspected."

They crowded round him, watching while he wrote.

"Ma sh' Allah! He knows his business. It is written like the best of scribes. It is worth the seeing. By the Prophet, O Mabrûk, a man well educated on thy likeness ought not to remain a common soldier, poor like us. In thy place, I would write to Ahmed Bey Arâbi, who loves us soldiers, and petition for some employment more befitting my great talents. He need not know that thou hast killed and been a robber. That is what I should do, and very quickly."

"Wallahi, and so should I," exclaimed the rest in chorus.

Mabrûk at that time only smiled at their advice, deeming it a dream of poor, ignorant men who always ascribe to education the powers of magic. But on the morrow, happening to hear that a levy of troops for service in the horrid Sûdân was shortly to be made, he changed his mind very suddenly. He had no wish to go to that accursed region, where thousands of poor, righteous soldier-men had perished miserably by pestilence, by wild beasts, and the spears of ugly devils. There seemed just a chance that, with his education, he might, by petitioning, obtain a clerkship. So, encouraged by his comrades, he sat down in a quiet corner and covered a whole sheet with praise of Ahmed Arâbi, inserting humbly in the midst his own poor name and modest plea to be allowed to serve His Highness in a clerical capacity. Two similar petitions of less length, one in the French language, the other in the English, were enclosed as samples of his skill; and one of his comrades, who boasted a friend

among Arâbi's servants, pledged his word that the precious missive should not miscarry.

But days passed, and the petition remained unanswered. Mabrûk, impatient, inquired the names of other great men, and wrote to them in terms that would have flattered a stone into affability; but those letters, like the first, got no response. He was beginning to despair of ever advancing by this means, and to cast about in his mind for some new way to try, when, one morning, going as usual to the railings of the yard with intent to chaff passers-by, he saw a sweetmeat-seller's stall close by those railings, and in the person of its owner recognized 'Ala'd-dîn.

The latter gave a cry of joy, and springing on the low wall, exchanged kisses with his friend between the railings. He exclaimed:

"I ask pardon of Allah! O Sheykh of the Arabs! What do I behold? The light of my eyes a soldier, in the garb of servitude, and caged in bars like any savage beast! O the sin of it! Yet have courage, O my soul! My father charged me to seek thee here, and bid thee hope. He has a friend, thou knowest, Saïd Bey Ramadân, that same old man who dwelt so long with us and, as some say, played the traitor towards Muhammad en-Nûri. He gave me a letter for him, which I delivered yesterday in the evening, on my arrival in this city. His Beatitude received me very kindly; and by my life, I never saw so fine a house. He kissed the letter first, and, having opened it, he wept to read of thy unhappy plight. Though

he is no longer of the house of Efendîna, he is very rich, and so has many friends; and he promised to speak at once on thy behalf to the great Arâbi, who is all-powerful in the War Department. To-morrow, at this same hour, be here; by then, in sh' Allah, I shall have good news for thee."

'Ala'd-dîn was as good as his word. On the following day he was able to inform Mabrûk that the post of secretary to a certain great one had been obtained for him; and that same evening the glad news was confirmed officially, the commandant of the barracks in person announcing to Mabrûk his temporary release from military duties. While he collected his few belongings and put them together in a bundle, his comrades flocked around him, vying one with another to bespeak his interest. "Say that Muhammad Kheyr is a good man, and well deserving to be made an ombashi!" "Speak for thy friend Hassan, that he be not exiled to the Sûdân!" They clung so thick about him that it was with difficulty he could make his way down the stairs and out through the yard. His pride in this storm of popularity was great, and his affability consequently boundless, when, with a shout of "Out of my road, ye bastard sons of Pharaoh!" a cane descended on the heads of those in front of him. The crowd dispersed in haste, and Mabrûk stood face to face with Amîn Bey, the Circassian.

"Dog of a Masri! Son of a defiled mother! Dost dare to block my way and stare at me?" cried the officer; and seizing the bewildered young

man by the throat, he shook and flung him on one side.

Mabrûk measured his length on the ground, which seemed to be more than that brute beast intended, for he showed some compunction, asking if the dog was hurt, and, pulling out his purse, flung a silver coin at his victim.

Mabrûk rose slowly, grinding his teeth with rage. Recovering his bundle, he left the coin where it lay, and strode forth to where 'Ala'd-dîn stood by the gate awaiting him. He vowed under his breath to cut that wild beast in a thousand pieces, and give each piece to a different street dog, that so the defilement of the whole body might appear at the last day. He scarcely heard the kind wishes of the soldiers who manned the railings, as, gripping 'Ala'd-dîn's hand, he went forth into the city.

He was led straight to a hostelry, where the sweetmeat-seller had retained a room. There 'Ala'd-dîn soon prepared a little feast, the materials for which he had purchased beforehand, apologizing all the while for the poverty of the place, so far beneath what he would have desired for his soul's dear one. Nevertheless it was a matter for great praise that his beloved had been rescued from that accursed gaol. Would to Allah that he could have been freed for life from servitude; but alas! that was impossible without the payment of a sum of money so considerable that, had the Sheykh Mustafa disbursed it, it would have advertised his wealth and led to ruin.

So Mabrûk was still a soldier; but, in sh' Allah,

and by the protection of Saïd Bey Ramadân, that seeming disgrace might yet be turned to honour. Zeynab and his mother had wept much on account of his uncertain fate, and had put dust on their faces when they learnt he was a soldier. Rashîd, in consequence of the brawl that night at Tanta, had been subjected to a small fine and set at liberty. He was, happily, cured of his passion for the bad dancer. The two friends sat up late into the night, remembering days gone by, and making plans for the future.

CHAPTER XIX

Early next morning 'Ala'd-dîn took Mabrûk to the house of Saïd Bey Ramadân—a fine house with a walled garden situated in the Ismaîlîyeh quarter. The Bey was not yet up, but, their visit being announced to him, he called to them from an inner room to have patience while he washed and prayed. So they sat on their heels in a pleasant court adorned with shrubs in pots, and having in its centre a tank of clear water, where, after an hour or two, His Honour found them.

"I seek refuge in Allah! O Protector!" he exclaimed, in horror, catching sight of Mabrûk's uniform. "Did not my friend, the commandant of the barracks, say I had obtained permission for thee to dress as a scribe? Go out at once and purchase such a dress, and, when the change is made, return hither, and I will go with thee to the house of thy employer and make thee known to him."

Though the Bey commanded Mabrûk thus loftily to go out and buy, he did not offer to provide any money for the purchase. The soldier had nothing in his hand, and 'Ala'd-dîn, for all his

eagerness to help, could not make up a third of the price of a decent gown and turban, not to speak of drawers and other niceties. However, by free use of the name of Saïd Bey Ramadân, Mabrûk obtained what was required upon the earnest of a small deposit.

He changed his clothes at the shop, amid congratulations from the merchant and some passers-by who stopped to look, and, bidding 'Ala'd-dîn transport the discarded uniform to their hostelry, returned alone, and with high looks, to the house of his patron.

The Bey was waiting for him. Immediately on his arrival a servant of the house ran out and fetched a carriage, into which His Excellency was raised with the support of all the household. He graciously bade Mabrûk take seat beside him, and, holding his hand, spoke very kindly as they were borne in sunlight towards the heart of the city.

"I ask pardon of Allah! Thank me not, O my dear! Allah knows it is a joy for me to serve the son of thy most worthy father, who showed me such tender consideration in the first grief of my disgrace, before I had learnt to bear the pain of it with resignation. That pain, O my soul, is always with me. I still sigh for the grand routine, the stately ceremonial, the learned quarrels in the household concerning precedence and the proper forms of reverence. By the Prophet, the very trials and discomforts of that life are sweet in the memory. Praise be to Allah, I am rich and respected, as thou seest; but what are wealth

and consideration to compare with the habit of a lifetime? I have written endless petitions; I have made rich gifts to men of influence; I have rendered various and great services—such as the denouncing of that dreadful wild beast of a robber, with whom thou—rash youth!—wast foolish enough to associate; but all my exertions hitherto have been in vain. Our good lord is inexorable, and that—merciful Allah!—at a time when he has great need of men's devotion, when his authority is set at nought, and all who seek preferment court the favour of his enemies. His uprightness holds still aloof from me, though, Allah witness, my fault was of the smallest and quite unintentional. Now I seek in my mind to do him some service so momentous that the tidings of it cannot fail to turn his face towards me." The old man dropped his voice to a coaxing whisper, and softly fondled Mabrûk's hand. "Ahmed Arâbi and his confederates are all good friends of mine, for it behoves a man of my possessions to make sure of friends in power, whatever happens. But they manifest unkind distrust of me; they exclude me from their councils. Now thou, O Mabrûk, art a very clever youth and well educated; moreover, I love thee as my own son. In the honourable position in which I am about to place thee thou art in the heart of their intrigues, and canst well oblige me by letting me know from time to time the details of their policy without impediment to thy career, which is my affair. The information shall be rewarded, I assure thee, in proof whereof accept this trifle. And now, not a word, for we draw near

the place. This matter is a secret between me and thee."

His Honour closed the hand of his accomplice upon a golden pound, and pressed it tenderly.

The carriage, which for some time past had been engaged in a labyrinth of unpaved, straitened ways, now reached a point where it could go no further. Mabrûk helped his patron to alight, and gave him the support of his arm to mount a passage sloping upwards between high old houses. Nothing could exceed the meanness of this narrow lane, nor the squalor of the doorways opening on to it. Mabrûk was quite unprepared, when they passed in at one of those doorways, to find himself of a sudden in a well-appointed, even stately, dwelling. A servant, who appeared himself a man of station, ushered them up a flight of clean stairs to a room well furnished in the Frankish manner, where he left them with choice blessings, saying he would go at once and call his master. The Bey, after proving the discomfort of a chair or two, settled himself upon a divan near the window. Mabrûk, a prey to nervousness, remained standing.

After a little while the door opened, and the lord of the house came in. He ran at once to Saïd Bey Ramadân, to stop his rising, which was a slow and painful process because of his fat, and bade him welcome and thrice welcome, with distinguished blessings. Then, at a motion from the Bey, he took notice of Mabrûk, who stood before him lowly, with feet and hands religiously hidden and eyes downcast, yet secretly observant

of his new employer. Like Saïd Bey Ramadân, the master of the house was clad in high red fez and black frock-coat, and his face and complexion were those of a pure Osmanli. His close-clipped beard was red, his skin was sallow, his brown eyes, rather deep-set in the head, kept flashing and clouding beneath a pair of prominent and bushy red eyebrows. The tarbûsh pressed low down on the forehead gave to the face a false effect of sternness, like a constant frown. His name, it transpired, was Omar Efendi Fehmi.

Saïd Bey, having performed the introduction, was in haste to depart. Omar Efendi ushered him forth deferentially, leaving Mabrûk alone with his disappointment at finding himself in the service of a Turk, the type of arrogance. From his experience in barracks he had learnt to hate the Turks, and why Ahmed Arâbi, the soldier's friend, the champion of the Egyptians, should admit this Turk of Turks to his counsels baffled imagination.

CHAPTER XX

Omar Efendi soon returned. He called for pens and ink and a supply of paper; and when they were brought by the servant, he bade Mabrûk sit down at a table and write from his dictation to a high official of the Government, himself taking his ease upon the divan and throwing out suggestions carelessly while he smoked a cigarette. As soon as the letter was complete he asked to see it, and, having read, remarked, "Perfect," and tore it across. By that the scribe understood that he was on his trial, and his heart beat in his brain, confusing it.

When required to pen a letter in French from His Excellency's dictation in Arabic, he hesitated, and had to beg for every sentence to be repeated. His taskmaster asked for the document as before. He smiled maliciously as he observed, "Very nice," then tore and flung it aside. The next demand was for a letter in English, which Mabrûk made better than its predecessor by the simple expedient of not listening, but writing just what struck himself as fitting, using words he knew. Omar Efendi at this seemed much amused. He did not tear up the epistle, but laid it down beside him on the divan.

Mabrûk was beginning to ache all over from long continuance in an unnatural posture, and his soul condemned the father of that Frankish chair. Yet the tyrant kept him thus for nearly an hour, till the pain in his back and knees became excruciating, and he had much ado to keep from groaning aloud.

At length his chief exclaimed: "Enough. Thou art a passable scribe, but not an excellent. Come now, sit here by me!"

Mabrûk obeyed, marking, however, a respectful distance.

"Dost drink smoke?" inquired His Excellency, and reached him a cigarette. Mabrûk imprinted a kiss upon the gracious hand, with praise to Allah for such affability. Lighting his cigarette from that of his lord, held out to him for the purpose, he began to feel more at ease.

"Thou art a clever youth and well educated," said Omar Efendi after a pause; "but I should have sought one cleverer and more highly trained had I required a scribe only. Saïd Bey hinted thou hadst been in mischief, and the fact of thy volunteering for the military service interested me. I caused inquiry to be made at the barracks amongst the soldiers, and thus learnt that thou hast been a robber and killed men. Is that true?"

"I ask pardon of Allah! It is false . . ." Mabrûk began in fear to protest, but a flash of the Turk's eyes silenced him.

"Think not I blame thee, or desire thy punishment. Nay, a bold man is worth his wages in these troublous times, and criminals serve well

him who knows their secret. If thou doest ill by me, I shall deliver thee up to justice; but so long as thou doest well, I know of naught against thee. Shrink not from any task with which I charge thee, indulge no scruples in my service, and peace be with thee."

Mabrûk could not reply. He saw in a flash his liabilities, the awful depths to which his foolish lie might lead him. The Turks, it was known, had no compunction. He might be called upon to kill a man in earnest. It was in his mind to confess the truth, and risk being sent back to the barracks; but his manhood could not bear to face such shame, and in a little the emotion passed from him, and he accepted the part allotted, trusting to Allah and his own ingenuity to escape from crime.

Omar Efendi lay back upon the couch, and, smiling, watched his perturbation. Suddenly leaning forward, he said:

"How much did the old pimp give thee?"

"What meanest thou, O my lord?"

The Turk did not explain at once, but said:

"Now listen! His Excellency Saïd Bey Ramadân is a friend of mine and thine, but he cares for neither of us. His sole intent is to regain the post at Court which he so stupidly forfeited. He looks to the Khedive, lacking wit to see that the Khedive is finished, done with." Here Omar Efendi clashed his hands together, like cymbals, to express finality. "Hundreds beside himself have suffered from the demand of Muhammad Tewfik and the Franks for honesty,

which, carried to excess, is mere stupidity. They have all cast in their lot with the friends of revolution and reform. He alone seeks reinstatement, being a poor-spirited old man, without initiative. Be not like him, or thou wilt harvest grief and disappointment. For suppose, for the sake of argument, that the party of the Court triumphs, and that thou hast conduced to their triumph by furnishing information through Saïd Bey Ramadân. What is thy reward? Perhaps a place in the ranks of the bodyguard, perhaps a little clerkship in the Ministry of War; and in either post thy tenure would be most precarious, dependent on thy neglecting the natural talents God has given thee. By the Prophet, it is asses, it is oxen, they require, not men. Whereas, if thou cast in thy lot with us, thou mayst rise to any eminence, once the reform is made."

"But—forgive me, O my lord—as yet I understand not perfectly. Is not all well with the land, by the blessing of Allah?"

"A fellâh or a merchant might think so," said the Turk, turning his shrewd eyes on Mabrûk with a subtle smile; "but that is not the view of men of parts and spirit, who would rise to fortune. What hope is there for such in the present order, where, to earn promotion, a man must emulate the stupidity of an ox turning a sakieh."

"But, O Excellency, with what eyes would the Majesty of the Sultan view a revolution?"

Omar Efendi laughed at the interruption. He said:

"Be assured, O my dear, the Sultan knows his business; and I, who am an Osmanli from Istanbûl, am not likely to forget his sovereign dignity. If the movement is called National and Popular, it is to attract the Franks, who look for peoples and nationalities. Arâbi Bey has friends among the French and English who inform him what is required. Now, tell me what that sometime pander to the lusts of Ismaîl gave thee by way of bribe?"

Mabrûk then showed His Excellency the piece of gold, and declared himself a Nationalist from his cap and turban down to the very soles of his feet. Omar Efendi remarked that the sum struck him as disproportionate to the services required, and himself gave thrice the amount to Mabrûk, on the understanding that he was to exaggerate the strength of the revolutionary party in his reports to Saïd Bey Ramadân.

"Thou canst say that the learned and a majority of the notables are with us. Such a rumour, coming from a source held trustworthy, can hardly fail to work its own fulfilment. From the beginning we have held the Prince and his Ministers inactive through vague terror by means of reports cunningly disseminated, thus gaining time to create and marshal forces, which did not at first exist. Now tell me, thou who comest from the barracks, how do the soldiers speak of their friend Arâbi?"

"Wallahi, as the sun at his rising; as the river when it overflows and brings us plenty!"

"Good. I would have thee continue to mix on

friendly terms with the common soldiers, and bring me word of their complaints and grievances. Arâbi must obey their lightest whim. Knowest thou of any crying evil that could be redressed?"

Mabrûk, with comely diffidence, recounted the brutal jests of the Circassian officers (he would not include the Turks, out of regard for his companion's feelings), how they called the men "accursed spawn of Pharaoh," and treated them worse than dogs. As an example, he told of the ill-usage he himself had endured at the hands of that wicked devil-may-care, Amîn Bey. Omar Efendi seemed interested, and, taking a little book from his pocket, made certain notes.

"Amîn Bey, a Circassian, sayest thou? And his removal would please the soldiers? In sh' Allah, he and his associates will give us an opportunity before long. They are Ahmed Arâbi's personal enemies, firmly rooted in their allegiance like senseless trees. Now, O Mabrûk, I have talked to thee freely as to a friend. It remains only for me to bid thee have a care. Betray my confidence to Saïd Bey Ramadân or any other, and thy corpse will be found floating in the river one fine morning."

Mabrûk strove to treat the menace as a laughing matter, but could not, with the Turk's eyes fixed on him. In those eyes blazed the ferocity of some ghoul or savage beast. He reproached his patron's doubts of him, swearing that his soul reposed between the two feet of His Excellency, and that His Highness was nothing less than his father and his mother.

"Return to-morrow at the third hour," said the Turk. "Now go in safety."

It was some time ere Mabrûk could get rid of the disagreeable impression left by the great man's threats, and the horrid glance which had enforced them. Only by constantly recalling his own innocence of the least intention to betray His Honour's secrets could he escape the conviction that his death was imminent. However, it appeared that his employment was to be a peaceable one, for the present at any rate; there was no immediate call for the exercise of his supposed bravery, and that, at least, was matter for thanksgiving. By the time he rejoined 'Ala'd-dîn at their hostelry, his mind was cheerful once again, and he retailed the whole adventure with elation.

"I ask pardon of Allah!" murmured the sweetmeat-seller, horror-struck, when all was told. "Who would have believed there were such bold, wicked men in the world? To conspire against Efendîna, who, all agree, is good and a friend of justice; verily, this is a thing to be recorded in books and stored up in libraries, that the wise may relate it to the ignorant, the father to the son, and so the memory of it may endure until the world's end. If it were told in our village, men would not believe it. Nevertheless, it is from Allah; it is not our business. Our business is to praise God for His mercy in releasing thee, Mabrûk, from shame and slavery, and putting thee in a way by which men rise to honour."

It being the Day of Assembly, the two friends

went together to a mosque at noon, and heard with rapture an impassioned sermon on the intrinsic vanity of worldly aims. They spent the remainder of the day in viewing the sights of the town, and, having supped at a public eating-house, sat up on the high flat roof of their hostelry, looking over the huddled, drowsy city to the Mocattam Hill, where the dome and minarets of the citadel appeared in silhouette against the starlit sky.

CHAPTER XXI

'Ala'd-dîn was of help to Mabrûk in his new business of an informer, for the sweetmeat-seller visited all the taverns in the quarter with his tray of candies, and in his slow progress through the crowded markets overheard the remarks of all kinds of men; and, ever mindful of Mabrûk's interests, his ear caught all that was political, and stored it in his brain for repetition. The merchants, with most peaceful citizens, were adverse to the revolutionary party. They cursed the name of Ahmed Arâbi and all who held with him, marvelling at the Khedive's long-suffering, and blaming it not a little. Their dislike of the standing army was great, and that soldiers should presume to meddle with the government appeared to them the last impertinence. Mabrûk informed his patron of their attitude; but Omar Efendi shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"Merchants, fellahîn, oxen—all are one! So long as they feed and sleep in peace, what do they care? They are fixed and callous, like the trees, the desert hills, and in like manner negligible."

For the first few days Omar Efendi was on

his guard with his new servant; and Mabrûk, wherever he went, even on his own errands, had an uneasy sense of being watched. But after a while, when he had given proofs of zeal and honesty, His Honour trusted him with less reserve, and each day, lounging in his morning-gown, discussed the prospects of the party frankly with him, reviewing the work done and laying plans for the day. Omar Efendi showed an actual hatred of Saïd Bey Ramadân, saying that he carried silliness to inexcusable lengths. Many were the schemes he invented for gulling the poor old man and leading him on to conclusions wholly erroneous; and in this, as in all else, Mabrûk was his willing slave.

Admitted to the intimacy of his chief, he soon came to rate himself on an equality, and, adopting the Turk's standpoint, looked on all mankind as simple ministers to his ambition. He renewed acquaintance with some of his former comrades in the School of Medicine, and finding them to be ardent supporters of the revolutionary faction, which stood in their minds for civilization, he made use of them to spread those lying rumours of which his chief was fertile. He would fain at this time have resumed the Frankish dress, as becoming one who marched in the van of progress; but when he mentioned this desire to his patron, Omar Efendi forbade him to gratify it.

"For negotiations with the Franks, it had been well," he said; "but thy skill is insufficient for such work. I employ thee for dealing with the men of Masr, so the dress of Masr best becomes thee."

That was one of many little snubs by which the young man was put back in his place when he moved out of it. But, being administered in private, such rebukes only dashed his spirits for the moment, and did not prevent his posing to the outside world as the great man's guardian. In this capacity he, in common with the major-domo, received gifts from all who sought his master's favour; indeed, such presents were a recognized part of his wages, and, with those which he received from Saïd Bey Ramadân, they enabled him to cut a figure in private life.

In the course of his various avocations he gleaned all that was commonly known concerning the Turk, his master. Though generally disliked, Omar Efendi was implicitly trusted, not less by the learned doctors and rich notables, who, as a rule, fought shy of the reforming party, than by Arâbi, Tûlba, and the so-called Nationalists. He was said to be a secret envoy from the very throne of Power, the Sublime Gate itself. Mabrûk had ample evidence that he held all the threads of the political tangle in his hands, and saw all the issues far more clearly than did the reputed leaders, who depended much on his advice.

Beyond the writing of a letter now and then, Mabrûk's situation was clerical in name only. Now he attended the levées or the macâmât of men of station, as an accredited agent; now he dogged the footsteps of some individual, or gathered information by eaves-dropping, as a common spy; so that in his heart he knew not in what light to regard himself, but took refuge in the

supposition that men were created for equivocal employments, since every son of Adam is provided with two hands, one honourable, the other shameful. Being haunted on his errands by a dread of secret agents of the Government, he sometimes changed clothes with 'Ala'd-dîn, and borrowed his tray of sweetmeats for an hour. Sometimes he appeared in filth and rags like a holy beggar, at others in black frock-coat and trousers like some small official. But disguise as he would, some acquaintance was sure in the end to recognize him and explode in laughter—a thing which mortified him not a little, and made him discard a dress so insecure. Thus, through no fault of his own, he was put to much expense in the matter of clothes.

One morning he brought his master news of the arrival in the city of a mad fanatical dervish, newly come from Yenbûa, who went about the streets urging men to rise and slay the infidels. Omar Efendi asked if any hearkened.

"Few gave any heed," replied Mabrûk, "and those in pity, as is natural, for he is evidently mad, the poor one!"

Omar Efendi exclaimed on the callousness of the inhabitants of Egypt, whom even the sacred cry of religion failed to animate. Nevertheless, he seemed to think that something might be done with that dervish, for he enjoined Mabrûk to seek him out and ascertain his mind to earn some money.

As it happened the fanatic in question made his abode not far from the hostelry where Mabrûk

lodged with 'Ala'd-dîn, in a recess in the inner wall of a great gateway, the entrance to one of the most crowded bazaars in all the city. Here he invoked the Most High through the heat of the day, and slept at night. Hither, in accordance with his instructions, Mabrûk repaired at the noonday hour, and found him seated on the ground below his niche.

The hair of his head, all long and matted, hung down upon the shoulders of an ancient coat of skins; that of his face had never felt a comb. By his side, against the wall of monstrous stones, leaned his mahganeh, the mystic's staff. He sat in the breath of the crowd as if in solitude, muttering petitions, with his eyes closed. The hand which held out a little can for alms alone seemed conscious of the passers-by. Mabrûk, for a beginning, dropped a trifle in the can, and blessed the owner thereof in choice Arabic. The man returned the salutation mechanically, and went on muttering without opening his eyes. Then Mabrûk, rather at a loss how to proceed, took the boldest course, and sat down beside the ascetic with his back to the wall. He began to speak of gold in a low voice, and how honourably it could be earned nowadays by one who hated the Franks and had the welfare of El Islâm at heart, watching his man narrowly all the while out of the corners of his eyes. Sitting in the depth of shadow, he could see, beyond the profile of the mad dervish, the fierce sunlight reigning in the street without, which circled approaching figures with a white halo, lost the

moment that they came beneath the ancient gateway.

The dervish appeared to be listening, for he ceased to mutter, though he kept his eyes shut; and Mabrûk was going on to beg him to present himself at such a house at such an hour, when the recluse sprang up suddenly, and with eyes of fire—eyes mad with the drug hashîsh—roared:

"I seek refuge in Allah from Satan the Stoned!"

In the twinkling of an eye he seized his staff and fell to beating Mabrûk about the head and shoulders, yelling:

'Gold! Gold! It is the cry of the Frank! Who recks of gold that looks for Paradise? May Allah blast thee, ugly servant of Eblîs!"

He was still shouting and leaping wildly with his staff on high when Mabrûk rushed in at the door of his hostelry, having covered the distance of two hundred yards or more with a speed to inconvenience other wayfarers.

When next morning he reported his failure, Omar Efendi laughed, and said: "He is not of Masr," with a plain innuendo which distressed Mabrûk. As if the Muslimîn of Egypt were more venal than those of Turkey or Arabia!

As summer advanced, and the burden of the noonday sun became intolerable, the merchants in the unroofed bazaars put up each his piece of matting for a shelter, and the variety of awnings down the length of every market resembled the spread wings of hanging bats. The modern quarter, with its wide, open streets, was shunned

of all men save in the late evening, and wore the aspect of a deserted city. The Court and all high functionaries had removed to the cool sea-air of Iskenderîyeh. But Mabrûk's employer still remained in the capital, quiet as a spider amid his strengthening web of intrigue.

In those first days Mabrûk met none of the leaders in revolution at the house of Omar except the Sayyid Abdullah Nadîm—a political divine, and editor of a journal called *Fostât*, famous for its fury against Europeans. An elderly man, of modest—nay, demure—aspect, he usually told his beads with eyes downcast, silent while Mabrûk was in the room. But the youth was soothed by his devout demeanour, and impressed by the tenderness with which the Turk deferred to him. In truth, there was about the man an old-world saintliness which raised a sob in the throat of the beholder, and the evident regard of this zealot for Omar Efendi sanctified the dissimulations of the latter's spy. Owing much to the countenance of this good man, which lulled his conscience, Mabrûk grew happy in his new position, and at the end of three short weeks felt so established that he resolved to send for Zeynab to come and join him. 'Ala'd-dîn also longed to see his wife and children once more, so it was arranged that he should go to the village and escort both women, Mabrûk defraying all expenses of the journey. The next point for consideration was a place of residence. 'Ala'd-dîn experienced no difficulty in finding a single room which was all he needed. But Mabrûk

desired a suite of rooms, in a dignified quarter where respectable Muslims resided with their womenfolk, and Zeynab need fear neither contact with infidels nor the insulting pursuit of lewd, unsettled bachelors. The lodging he had occupied of old, when at the School of Medicine, occurred to him as fulfilling all his requirements. He had recourse to the landlord, and hearing it was again to let, paid the rent for three months in advance, and went at once with 'Ala'd-dîn to take possession.

The doorkeeper failed at first to recognize Mabrûk, and gaped when the latter greeted him by name; but soon remembering, he grinned delightedly, and touched hands with him.

"Is the lady also returning?" he asked, as he led the way up the well-worn stairs. Getting answer in the affirmative, he murmured, "Praise to Allah," with a face of grave concern. "In sh' Allah, thy house shall flourish and thy seed increase."

While Mabrûk and 'Ala'd-dîn were looking through the rooms, he remained by the door, and muttered to himself uneasily; and when they issued forth again he pointed to the wooden bolt, which was loose, and advised the tenant to have it strengthened.

"Why? What ails thee, O sheykh?" exclaimed Mabrûk, amused at such solicitude.

The doorkeeper protested that there was nothing the matter, that he spoke but in a general way, as for security; yet all the time his mind seemed troubled, for he muttered in

confusion, with eyes hidden, and his grin was mirthless.

Mabrûk, inquiring after other inmates, was informed with the same sad grin that they were all away. He had already noticed the unusual silence of the house; but that was nothing odd, for it was summer, a season when many of the well-to-do betake themselves to the villages. The two young men could make nothing of the behaviour of the old Nubian. They joked upon it, marvelling, as they went their way.

CHAPTER XXII

'Ala'd-dîn was prepared to start at once for the village, but when Mabrûk offered him the price of a third-class ticket on the iron road, he refused, declaring there would be enough to pay when he returned with the women and children. His plan was to walk to the port of Bûlâc and there take boat. It would be strange indeed if, among all the mariners there congregated, he could not find some true believer sailing northward who would take him on board for company.

Mabrûk, having the remainder of the afternoon on his hands, journeyed with him to the river-side, and there lingered in converse with the sailors, hearing talk of variable winds and the river's changing bed and rising flood, till after sunset, when he set out on his return to the city proper.

That evening had been fixed for a convocation of the cautious learned to debate on the political situation, and Mabrûk was under orders to attend the gathering and observe closely the speech and behaviour of one man, the Sayyid Muhammad Hâfiz, from whose attitude the party of reform had most to hope or fear; so at least

said Abdullah Nadîm, who was well acquainted with the characters of all the learned, though himself in bad odour with the more discreet among them.

The place of meeting was the house of a great notable, who was known for a friend of Ahmed Bey Arâbi. Through a clean-swept court and antechamber Mabrûk was shown into a large cool room, lighted at the far end by a solitary hanging-lamp of fine workmanship, whose rays fell upon the turbans of a circle of grave elders sitting cross-legged on the dais, and roused the sheen of their silken robes. The young man made obeisance from the threshold, and continued figuratively to scoop up dust until he came near the foot of the dais. Here he would have stopped and sat down humbly, but the owner of the house prevented him, saying:

"Thou art expected, and very welcome. My house is thy house. His Excellency Omar Efendi has our deep respect, and we are glad to have his friend and servant with us."

He drew Mabrûk into the circle and presented him, adding: "We shall speak freely."

These sentiments were echoed by all the company; but as for speaking freely, it seemed now beyond their power to do so, though at his entrance the discussion had been unreserved. One and another spoke, but their remarks were purely complimentary, of the kind men use to temporize and hide their thoughts.

After such colourless polite speeches, the voice of the Sayyid Muhammad Hâfiz, grave, sincere,

impressed Mabrûk like the grasp of a firm hand.

The Sayyid was still in the prime of life, and his face, as he fingered his beard and spoke quite naturally, was of perfect self-reliance, without arrogance. His eyes were large and rather prominent—eyes of the seer, not the man of action; but the trenchancy of his arguments and the decision of his rare gestures made it clear that he was no mere dreamer. Though younger by many years than most men there, he was heard by all with respect, for his clear descent from the Prophet combined with his wealth and famed uprightness to give him influence. Only three days since he had returned from Esh Shâm, where he owned much property. In truth, he belonged to no one province, but to El Islâmîyeh, and was as much at home in Samarcand or Mekka as here in Egypt. Viewing this world from the heights of true religion, he saw in its political concerns, for the most part, only a strife of base ambitions, of which the strivers would be ashamed at the Last Day. Yet he was susceptible of fervour where a religious principle seemed at stake; and, by insisting on the affront to religion in certain of the changes lately ordered by the Khedive, the friends of discontent had hopes to win him to their side.

"In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate," he began devoutly, "it behoves us Learned in Religion who have to think for the Muslimîn, not in Masr only, but in all the world, not to be deceived by vain appearances; but

where there is discontent, to examine the grounds thereof, as well as the character and general conduct of its exponents, before we say that it is just and lawful. Now, the spokesmen of the disaffected in this province come to us as men devoted to the religion of our lord Muhammad (God bless and save him!). They call the late restrictions on the sale of slaves an outrage done to El Islâm; they denounce His Highness the Khedive as a dangerous innovator, a willing tool in the hands of Jews and Nazarenes. That is one face of them, and, were it the only one, we might give ear; but to the Franks they pose as ardent champions of the civilization of Europe and its so-called progress. They state their aim to establish in this district a Government by the many, on the pattern of that in France, a Government contrary to the dispositions of Allah most High, who gives discretion only to the few; and to every man who harbours an ambition they speak the language of his worldly lust. Where, then, is their great and single-hearted concern for El Islâm? The Faith of Muhammad (God bless and save him!) is the care of One Above. It requires of a man that he shall make himself small, not great; and these disturbers have no notion of its dignity, since they range it among the threads of their private intrigue.

"Now, I abhor the Franks and shun their company, yet is my abhorrence not of the men themselves, for their best are conscientious and well-meaning, nor of their interference with the Government, so much as of their civilization,

which is a foe to all religion—theirs as well as ours. It extols the science of men's brains in place of God; it regards not the world to come; and Allah knows we have enough of it. These foreigners insult our customs, they demoralize our population, they treat us Muslimîn as savages, they take advantage of a privilege, conceded to protect their subjects from oppression and violence, to instal their vices in our midst. Their governors mean well, it may be, being men of standing; but the low people in those lands outcry the rulers, and their word is the word of the ignorant—for evil always.

"Now, there is among them in their lands a kind of man whose trade it is to stir up anger in the people. Ahmed Arâbi has heard tell of such an one, and how he rose to greatness. But he has to reckon with the temper of a race not mad, like the Franks of to-day (who combine together easily, rebel for nothing, and often spend their lives in the pursuit of vain abstractions), people who, though subject to occasional excitements, soon recover their wits—the praise to Allah!—and see clearly, every man his own objective. We have been often assured that this soldier and his friends are not rebellious. Then, I put it to you in the name of the Highest, whither are they tending? If a strong party is with pains collected, every member of which seeks his own advancement at the expense of the present order, and is personally hostile to the ruler, if the army is deliberately seduced from its allegiance, who, save Allah Most High, can avert rebellion? And

if rebellion comes—which Allah forbid!—what then, I ask you? Will not the Franks invade the country and restore order with fire and sword, rather than lose the money which their subjects have invested in this region? In their lands there is but one voice stronger than the voice of the illiterate for the guidance of affairs: it is that of the Jew, the usurer. And even were Arâbi to succeed, what would ensue? Without capacity or experience for the work of government, he would be trodden under foot of his late supporters, everyone struggling for the highest power. The land would be plunged in anarchy, and its innocent inhabitants would suffer frightful hardships.

"Are either of these contingencies to be preferred to the rule of an upright man, a true believer, and stanch friend of justice? I say Muhammad Tewfik is all this, not because he is my friend from childhood, but as one who speaks the truth before Allah. He submits to the Frank commissioners only in order that the huge debt which his father incurred may by their help in time be paid off, which done, there will be an end, in sh' Allah, to an interference which His Highness deplores as much as we do.

"So far as I, by the grace of Allah, am able to judge, it behoves us all as sane men and believers in The One God to support the authority of His Highness, who has done nothing to forfeit our approval, unless by his too great leniency towards such disturbers. Would to Allah he had given ear to his father's word which he spoke at parting

concerning these firebrands. But his own worth blinded him. Allah is greatest!"

The Sayyid Muhammad Hâfiz held his peace. A whisper of relief ran round the circle. Its members shifted in their seats, with furtive glances at Mabrûk as at a point of danger.

"But suppose the present Government were overthrown, what then, O Beatitude?" the delegate of Omar Efendi questioned lamely.

"Then it would be from Allah. We are Muslimîn. Then we should have to take counsel what man to support in the interests of the poor inhabitants of this region. But I thought that the aim of your party was not rebellion."

"But the favour of the Sultân . . . His Excellency Omar Efendi?" put in the master of the house, with a pleading glance at Mabrûk.

"If Omar Efendi is in truth an envoy of the Suzerain, he is not accredited, and so may be disowned. He bears a good character, and is reputed clever, thus much I have ascertained; but he is not a counsellor to put much faith in. Had he anything of moment to communicate, he would have come to us himself, not sent his servant."

At this remark of the Sayyid, Mabrûk rose with as fine a show of indignation as might consist with his humble standing amid such great ones, and, in spite of the efforts of the master of the house to detain him, took a dignified leave.

He borrowed a lantern from the night watchman at the outer door, and with that and his staff fared forth by narrow alleys, into which the stars peered as down a well, under archways

and through tunnels, to his own abode. Twice a watchman summoned him to attest the Unity of God, and a fellow-wayfarer with a lantern wished him a happy night as he sped by. At one point he caught the sounds of revelry, of stringed instruments and the rhythmic beat of drums, from some house where a wedding or a circumcision was being celebrated. But for that, and the occasional rush and snarl of a dog on his passage, the streets were empty and wrapped in silence. His mind was still much disturbed by the speech he had just heard. If the Sayyid had spoken truth in denouncing the revolutionaries and prophesying their failure, it might be wise for him (Mabrûk) to court the favour of Saïd Bey Ramadân. But he stood in such awe of the Turk, his present master, that he dared not face the thought of playing false to him. To fail and perish with him were better than to incur his anger. It was a sore dilemma for a poor righteous youth, whose sole endeavour was to do his best with the talents God had given him.

Lost in such speculations, he was approaching the door of his house, when footsteps sounded close behind him. By the light of the stars he saw a tall man in an officer's uniform staggering after him up the narrow lane.

Mabrûk made haste to gain his own doorway, and was proceeding to rouse the doorkeeper, asleep upon a couch before it, when a voice cried:

"Out of my way, polluted son of Pharaoh!" and he was flung back with violence against the wall, while the new-comer assailed the sleepy doorkeeper with hideous imprecations, bidding

him make haste and open. It was Amîn Bey, the Circassian. Mabrûk watched him enter the house as one who dwelt there, and then, as his heavy footfalls receded up the stairs, Mabrûk sprang upon the old Nubian and gripped him fiercely by the arm, hissing:

"Why didst thou not tell me that a bully dwelt here?"

"Wallahi, O my dear, that is not my business. For me to disgust a tenant would be to anger the proprietor, and so lose my place. I did my best by hints to convey something of the matter to thy intelligence. Besides, he is not altogether a bad man. He is generous and makes me presents, more than all the rest did put together. He is only to be feared when very perfectly drunk, and that is not the case more than once in a month. Place a new strong bolt upon thy door, and thou with all thy house shalt dwell in safety, in sh' Allah."

Mabrûk now understood why the house, which had been so full, was thus deserted. Sober, urbane men, with wives and concubines, had fled the proximity of a dissolute ruffian. To the danger of that proximity he had, all unwittingly, exposed Zeynab, a woman young and lively, and free with her eyes, as he had noticed once or twice. Moreover, he feared for his little son, having heard that it is a favourite exercise of the Circassians for two men to draw their swords and toss a naked babe from point to point. Amid the darkness, and alone, all the horrors in the world seemed imminent. Locked in his rooms, he spent a wretched night.

CHAPTER XXIII

In the morning Mabrûk went in indignation to the owner of the house, but the rogue, a fat merchant, declined to treat his complaint seriously, and when he angrily asked for his money to be returned, threatened to hale him before the judge. Unable to afford to throw away so large a sum, Mabrûk saw no escape from dwelling with Zeynab in the house of peril; so, with mouth full of curses, he sought out a carpenter's shop, and implored the professor who sat within to lose no time in fitting a strong new bolt to the door of his apartments. The craftsman, when the urgency had been explained to him, promised with Allah's leave to complete the job that very day.

By then the sun was up above the city roofs, and wayfarers in the street kept the shady side. Mabrûk made haste to the house of Omar Efendi, and was shown to his private room, where the Turk in a silk kaftan was lounging on a divan near an open window.

"Thou art late," was his remark, as Mabrûk made reverence, "and I expected thee early, in impatience to hear thy report."

"Alas, O my lord!" replied the youth, with

voice made hopeless by his private grief; "all is finished. The Sayyid Muhammad Hâfiz holds with Efendîna. He denounced us patriots in terms of so fierce an eloquence that all who heard him knew that he spoke truth."

"May Allah cut short his life!" muttered Omar Efendi; and he demanded a minute account of the speech and its effect upon the audience, cramming both ends of his moustache into his mouth as the tale proceeded, and gnawing them savagely with eyes fixed on the ground. When Mabrûk had done speaking, he sat thus a moment in silence, then broke out:

"The wild beast! The monster of pride and arrogance! If he contemns Arâbi thus openly, it is only because Arâbi is a soldier and the son of a fellâh, with no pretensions to be ranked among the learned. He derides him for fashioning his schemes upon the model of the Franks, as if the best of the inhabitants of Masr were not apes, as if the soil of Masr ever produced anything of its own except reeds and thistles! In sh' Allah, he shall learn that Arâbi has a will and an intelligence superior to his, the coxcomb! They wait to see our power, do they, those greybeards? In sh' Allah, they shall see it shortly, and with trembling. In the meanwhile, how to silence this intrusive marplot? He is the intimate friend of the Khedive, and may advise strong measures, which just now would ruin all, for our strength is not yet ripe. And if the substance of his speech against us gets abroad, it may weaken our supports, for many look to him."

"By the Prophet, he deserves to die," agreed Mabrûk feelingly.

"Ah, there speaks the eater of blood, the practised murderer!" cried the Turk with malice, and a sudden turn to mirth. "Thou thinkest only of blood, forgetting the price thereof. . . . O my friend, knowest thou that I have a drinker of blood, a brigand, in my service? Allow me to present to thee Mabrûk el-Masri, the greatest dare-devil thy province has produced since Ali el-Masri of the Thousand Nights and a Night."

The Sheykh Abdullah Nadîm, who had come in quietly behind Mabrûk, touched hands with the Turk and exchanged the usual cordialities ere turning his eyes upon the monster thus denounced to him.

"I seek refuge in Allah," he piously exclaimed. "But can it be? This youth looks innocent and most polite. Doubtless his crimes were caused by sudden anger, or the flame of jealousy which burns to madness."

"No, no! I assure thee, by Allah, he has hewn men limb from limb in cold blood all for gain. He has been a cutter of the road, a companion of the most desperate villains. . . ."

"I call Allah to witness! Our dear lord does but jest. Hear him not, O Excellency," protested Mabrûk, between shame and gratification at his master's pleasantry.

"To kill is not necessarily a crime," observed the visitor thoughtfully. "Who shall forbid the good to smite the erring, the righteous to destroy the wicked in the world? Since thou art brave,

O my son, direct thy valour against the evil-doer and the infidel, and all the headstrong who resist good counsel."

"Go out now, O Mabrûk, and smell the air, for I have to talk with His Reverence," said Omar presently. "After two hours return, and I will tell thee what to do."

Mabrûk went out obediently, and sat with the doorkeeper till the time appointed. When he returned, it was to find the Turk alone and in good humour, to judge by the laugh which ceased as he opened the door, and the difficulty which His Excellency seemed to experience in keeping a straight face.

"Have the kindness to sit down," he told his henchman. "Wallahi, these holy ones are rare sons of dogs! His Reverence told me a story the like of which I never heard for funniness. Now let me collect my wits, for I have commands of high importance for thee."

Mabrûk, with a light obeisance, professed his readiness for any service, and then sat patient till his patron had succeeded in driving the droll recollection from his mind and had recovered his accustomed sneering calm. At last, in hard, incisive tones, His Honour spoke:

"The Sayyid Muhammad Hâfiz threatens to trouble us. If he encourage the Government to move at once against us, all may well be lost. As yet all display of power, all arrogance, must be on our side, to inspirit waverers. Most of the native officers are with us, but not so many of the common soldiers. Whole regiments might

hang back on an emergency. Thou saidst well, a short while back, he ought to die, and weal betide the man who rids us of him. Thou thyself hast been a robber and killed men. Think on the matter, I beseech thee. It is worth thy while."

With that he fell to telling the beads of his chaplet, observing his prey the while shrewdly out of the corners of his eyes. At one moment it seemed the funny story told by the zealot recurred to his mind, for a tide of mirth threatened to overcome him; but he controlled it, and preserved the demeanour suited to so fierce a proposal.

Mabrûk's jaw fell. He stared at the floor as if he saw hell opened. At that moment he wished that he had been in truth a desperado, when he could have refused the dreadful task at once and nobly, calling his deeds to witness it was not through cowardice. But now he could not belie his own pretensions without for ever forfeiting his chief's regard. He stood mopping and mowing at his feet, while his head and hands shook wretchedly.

"I ask forgiveness of Allah!" he exclaimed scarce audibly. "It is too much to require of any man. That which I did formerly was done in the excitement of a struggle or in anger; they were men of no account; and yet their death is heavy on me. But this Sayyid is a man set high in honour, of the family of our lord Muhammad (God bless and save him!). No such crime has been committed since the slaying of our lord Hoseyn (on him be peace!). It is a sin

to darken heaven, to bring the wrath of Allah on this land. It is to earn the execration of all true believers."

"By Allah, thou knowest thy business!" Omar sneered. "Wouldst look on thy reward beforehand, clever one? Thy reward will be escape from punishment. Wouldst rather be dragged before the Câdi as a thief and slaughterer? The choice is with thee. Go and think on it. And take this letter to the house of Khalid Efendi. Go, I say!"

Mabrûk went forth from his patron's presence half blind, and with a singing in his ears. A few steps from the outer door, in the narrow dirty alley, he sat down in the dwindling shadow of the wall and wept, with chin upon his breast. The sunlight, blanching the high houses opposite, bearding with shadow their projecting lattices, ended close before his knees in an edge as sharp and dazzling as a sword-blade. Overhead was white fire. A doorkeeper asleep upon a threshold; a few dogs, sleeping likewise; a circling kite which kept crossing the strip of sky, its shadow flying up the house-fronts like a second bird; nothing else alive was in sight.

Mabrûk cursed the day that ever he had set eyes upon the Turk, his master; cursed that quick responsiveness of his brain to suggestion which had caused him to boast of crimes he had never committed. It was like a Turk to propose murder thus lightly, in the same tone that he would have used to order the removal of a stone from his path. Might Allah destroy the whole race of

Osman, for their wickedness mocked high Heaven! And the Sheykh Abdullah too! To what lengths had not zeal transported that devout, good man! Mabrûk was minded to fly from the city and return to his own village, to the slow, faithful life of the fellahîn. But all men knew him for a soldier, and his father's enemy, the Sheykh Mahrûs, was omdeh now. He would be apprehended as a deserter and brought back to be flogged and imprisoned, even if Omar Efendi failed to pursue him as he had threatened. He thought of the Franks as a refuge, for they were known to be averse to violence; but of that race he was acquainted with but two men, the Mûssiû Dibûn and the Mister Bâwwil, who had been among his teachers formerly, and of those he knew not the present whereabouts, nor could he hope, in view of their remembered haughtiness, that they would condescend to hear him if he did approach them.

A man, coming up the street with back bowed beneath a full and dripping skin of water, beheld the young man weeping, and stood still a minute to inquire the cause of woe.

"I have been robbed," was the rejoinder.

"May Allah right thy wrong," said the man feelingly, as, dashing the sweat from his brow, he went his way.

Mabrûk could not impart his grief to any man, nor seek advice of any true believer. This isolation, thus brought home to him, made his case more hopeless, and he wept anew. Even 'Ala'd-dîn would shrink from him in horror, did he learn the

truth; for there was only one way out of his present quandary, and that was by doing as the Turk enjoined him. Yet that, too, was impossible. He knew that he would die of horror in the act; and surely there was not in all the world a human creature at once so base and so courageous as to do it for him. Muhammad en-Nûri was finished, and, even had he been in existence, would certainly have demurred at so revolting a crime.

When his tears were exhausted, and the sun's rays had some time reached him, he rose and wandered in the streets, not caring whither. As if by predestination, he found himself passing the house of the Sayyid Muhammad. He had called there once with a letter from Omar Efendi; and the doorkeeper hailed him now as an acquaintance, and made him come into the entry and rest upon his bench a while. He sat there talking with a group of servants when the master of the house went forth alone. All rose and saluted as he passed, and he repaid their greeting as to friends and equals. Mabrûk watched his stately form recede down the street, which was empty at that hour, and noticed how he seemed in reverie, never once looking round, his loose robe swelling out behind him. It had been easy for a man to steal up unperceived and plant a dagger in between those noble shoulders: this sole conception was to Mabrûk so piteous that he had to gulp hard to restrain fresh tears.

Taking leave at length of his friend the doorkeeper, he called to mind the letter he had been charged to deliver. The notable to whom it was

addressed inhabited a distant suburb; yet Mabrûk chose to go on foot the whole way, though he did not lack the wherewithal to hire an ass, or even a carriage, for his need. In like manner, his errand done, he returned with hurried step, the step of guilt, not strolling like your man of quiet conscience. He traversed a quarter decked with masts and flags, and thronged with merry-makers, in honour of the Môlid of some local saint. On all hands he was invited to stop and share the fun, but he passed through the midst of the rejoicings without a thought for them. By then the sky was flooded with warm colours, and down in the streets men moved in a wondrous twilight tinted richly like the depth of clear water. Mabrûk, with fevered brain, strode on, disconsolate. He dared not do the deed required of him, yet dared not face his patron with the deed undone. He could not brook the thought of rest or food, or of anything else save self-abasement before Allah.

At the hour of the sunset-prayer he entered the mosque of the Hasaneyn, and there, by a pillar, spent the livelong night, watching from afar the lamp which burns before the shrine where rests the head of the martyr Hoseyn. He slept not a wink, but wept and prayed despairingly till a greyness of the dawn enveloped his surroundings, making them new and strange, increasing hopelessness. In that austere, pale hour his course was clear to him.

It was to denounce the Turk and all his wickedness, reckless of punishment, were it death by

torture. This day he would go betimes to Saïd Bey Ramadân, and, confessing all, implore that poor good man to warn the Sayyid of the plot to murder him. Then he himself would fly to the sea-coast, and seek a passage to some distant land, where the arm of Omar's fury might not reach him. Surely, on the revelation of so base a plot, Efendîna and the Franks would strike at last, and make an end of all the wicked patriots.

At the call to prayer from the minarets, when hosts of light rode up the sky, though night still lurked beneath the cloisters, he rose from off the flag where he had sat through all the darkness, and went and washed himself, and prayed the prayer of morning. Then he returned to his stone beside the pillar, and, with mind refreshed and vigilant, reformed his project.

His thought of Saïd Bey Ramadân as a go-between was foolish, he now perceived; for the old man was proverbially timorous, and had lately been so lavish of alarms that his warnings were become a standing joke. And there was no need for Mabrûk to blacken the face of Omar Efendi, who had been often kind to him, by denouncing him as instigator of the crime. No, by the Prophet; there should be no betrayal. He himself would go, as emissary of the Turk, and entreat the Sayyid to save himself by flight, since danger threatened him. When once that noble sheykh was safe away, Mabrûk could plead his absence in excuse for sparing him.

The sun had been some two hours seen above

the desert hill, and its rays were felt in the streets when Mabrûk presented himself at the house of Muhammad Hâfiz. He had come running, and his haggard looks and manifest disorder impressed the servants deeply. They supposed themselves in presence of the supernatural, and whispered one to another, "He has seen a vision." His petition for immediate access to their lord was heard with reverence. One ran hot-foot to inform His Grace, while another showed Mabrûk to the guest-chamber.

"Salvation be upon thee!"

The dignified figure of the Sayyid appeared in the doorway of the dim, cool room before Mabrûk had time to look about him or collect his wits. The young man cast himself at the feet of that benign one and kissed the hem of his robe, pouring forth his story with groans and agonized entreaties.

"Fly at once, O Emîr. It is the word of my master, who loves thee, though an enemy. He bade me implore your Highness not to linger in the city another hour, for he has knowledge of a hateful plot to slay thee. There are lawless men in the party, of whom the leaders have no firm control. For the love of Allah, I entreat thee, lose no time! Nay, if it become known that I and my lord have warned thee, behold us dead, the two of us! I implore thee, breathe no word to any man, but save thyself! Fly now, and secretly!"

The Sayyid heard with stupefaction. There was no questioning the sincerity of the messenger,

and yet so extraordinary a tale was hard to credit. He would fain have cross-examined the strange envoy; but Mabrûk, prompted by his good angel, only multiplied wild entreaties, and sobbing, "I have done my part; Allah witness, I am guiltless of thy blood!" kissed the Sayyid's hand suddenly, and fled from the house.

CHAPTER XXIV

Not until he had traversed many streets, dodging constantly so as to confound pursuit, did Mabrûk stop to fetch his breath. Then, seeing a cookshop near at hand, he went thither and ordered a large mess of beans, devouring which, he talked and jested with the professor. Once more there was pleasure in life. After an hour, spent amid the appetizing vapours of the cookshop, he hailed an urchin passing in the street, and sent him running with an urgent message to the doorkeeper of the Sayyid's house, who soon came, hurrying, with a face of grave concern.

"How fares it with thy master?" inquired Mabrûk when he drew near.

The doorkeeper's answer was he could not tell, because half an hour after Mabrûk's strange visit His Honour had started suddenly upon a journey.

"Whither does he travel?" inquired the youth.

"Wallahi, that is not known! He set forth suddenly and with scant preparations, yet he bade me not to expect him back for many days."

"Praise be to Allah! That is well!" replied Mabrûk with a sigh of relief so profound that the doorkeeper pressed for an explanation. But

Mabrûk, sitting up in the shop, surveyed him critically, and coolly blessed him for a man too curious. The doorkeeper then bowed and kissed his feet, and craved the signal honour of his benediction, calling him holy one and patron; for from the manner of his visit at the house that morning, and its strange effect upon the master, there was no doubt in the old slave's mind but that this youth was some known favourite of the Deity.

Having dismissed that man, Mabrûk took leave of the caterer, and strolled away, well satisfied. He had disobeyed his orders, it was true, and yet might suffer for it; but what pains soever disobedience brought on him must be light as compared with the sense of iniquity which had oppressed his soul this night. Now, by his instrumentality, the Sayyid Muhammad Hâfiz was saved from assassination, and a poor righteous youth escaped the guilt of murder. He walked the streets, exultant in his work and praising Allah.

But presently, when joy grew stale, his thoughts pressed onward towards the interview with Omar Efendi. He dreaded that keen, cruel flash of the Turk's eyes, which was of power to disconcert the coolest liar. If Omar found the tale too trite or plausible, he would suspect his veracity and make inquiries. When he learnt how Mabrûk himself had given warning to the Sayyid, his wrath against the traitor would be formidable. As the young man pondered these things, his brow clouded, and his step became less elastic.

In this chastened mood he reached his own abode, where the doorkeeper informed him that his wife had just arrived. Speeding up the stairs on those tidings, he could hear the voice of Zeynab raised shrill and scolding; and when he burst into the room he found his wife in act to slap the face of the wife of 'Ala'd-dîn, who had stayed to help her with the house-things. The child, in a corner on a heap of clothes, was sleeping peacefully.

No sooner had Mabrûk appeared on the scene than she turned her wrath upon him, and exposed her grievance.

"What is this?" she cried. "Our coming was not hid from thee; we were expected, yet none welcomed our arrival. I was made a laughing-stock for idlers in the street, who cried: 'She seeks her lord, but he has fled from her.' They mocked me loudly, holding their sides. And what kind of house is this for me to come to? Out on the stairs, while yet old Ali fumbled for the key, an officer of the soldiers touched me rudely. He strove to pull away my veil, and spoke vile words. By the Prophet, I shall not stay here! As soon as I am rested I shall return to the village."

The wife of 'Ala'd-dîn gladly left them to adjust their difference, and repaired to her husband's dwelling.

Painfully, by slow degrees, Mabrûk inveigled and cajoled his spouse to take more cheerful views of her surroundings. At length her sharp reproaches sank to gusty generalities. Mabrûk

had never been a knowing man, nor strong enough to make a model husband. He had never looked before him where he walked, nor yet behind to see if foes were near. Could anything, for example, exceed the folly of his indifference concerning the treasure of Muhammad en-Nûri, his rightful heritage? He had left the search to others. For weeks all the rascals of the village had been digging every night, now here, now there. And now it was certain that the Sheykh Mahrûs had found it—his house's enemy! For since his elevation to the post of omdeh, the old rogue had let men see that he had wealth. Not until the evening had she recovered sufficiently for him to recount his troubles of the past two days, and confide to her his present terror of his patron's wrath.

She scoffed at his alarms, declaring he had done most wisely.

"The man is gone, no one knows whither. Say thou hast killed him; who shall contradict thee? So thy lord will be pleased, and perhaps reward thee."

Mabrûk deliberated this advice, and found it excellent. It offered him the respite which was all he asked, since the future was in Allah's government. The Turk might die, or change his mind completely, long ere the Sayyid's fate was truly known. Glad of his wife's return, Mabrûk slept long and soundly.

In the morning he presented himself at the house of Omar Efendi, where he was hailed with loud thanksgivings by the servants, who had

begun to fear that he was lost for ever. The Turk was straightway informed of his arrival, and sent for him at once.

"Praise be to Allah, I behold thee once again!" he exclaimed at sight of him. "By the Prophet, I began to fear my words had scared thee right away. That would have grieved me, for I have a fondness for thee. . . . Well, what of the Sayyid Muhammad?" he asked, laughing.

Mabrûk bowed his head sorrowfully, and struck his palms together to express finality.

"Our Lord have mercy on him!" he said.

"I seek refuge in Allah!" Omar Efendi sat up suddenly, and stared at his pupil with dilated eyes. "Thou sayest. . . . But it cannot be! I have watched thee! Thou art a timid youth, inclined to pity; neither a brigand nor a murderer, except in jest! While laughing at thy pretensions with my friend before yesterday, it came into my mind, for fun, to scare thee. By Allah! it repented me an hour later, and yesterday, when thou camest not, I felt vexed, believing I had frightened thee in earnest, and should never see thee more. Yet now thou sayest . . . Our Lord have mercy upon him! May Allah pardon thee, and me also! There is no power nor might save in Allah the Tremendous! I call our Lord to witness that I spoke in jest. May Allah search out the heart of Abdullah Nadîm, who suggested the game to me. Allah is greatest!"

Mabrûk's concern was real at this disclosure. He had passed a day and a night in extreme anguish, had driven the best of men into banish-

ment, had strained his ingenuity to madness, and gazed on hell—for this. Truly these great ones had strange views of humour. Might Allah destroy the whole accursed race of Osman, who even for their mirth must cause men misery. He lifted his eyes upon his patron not in deference. Had there but been a weapon to his hand, he could have slain the heartless tyrant where he sat. But, strange to tell, no heartless tyrant met his gaze, but a strong man wrestling with remorse and misery. Omar writhed upon the divan, tears rolling down his cheeks, his lips trembling.

"Out of my sight, unhappy one! Fly! Hide thyself! Go to the Sheykh Abdullah, who may reward thee!" he moaned despairingly.

Mabrûk was nicely avenged. Soothed by the sight, and emboldened by his master's terror, he fell at the great man's feet, and told his story. His own audacity set a pulse beating in his brain, which made him deaf awhile. But soon he heard:

"The praise to Allah! He is gone, our enemy—that strong, proud man! And yet no blood has been shed, no crime committed. My joke is nothing to this jest of thine. Go on, O Mabrûk, as thou hast begun; and, by thy life, thou shalt attain the highest eminence. By the Prophet, thou hast done our patriots the greatest service, and I will see to it that they prove not ungrateful. From this day forth I love thee like my son. . . . Never again will I despise the intelligence of these fellahîn. No, Allah help me, never!"

And raising up Mabrûk, the Turk embraced him.

CHAPTER XXV

All this while Mabrûk was not forgetful of Saïd Bey Ramadân, but visited him once or twice in every week, and fed him full with tales of the spread of discontent, causing the poor old man to cry, "O Great Protector!" and wheeze and tremble on the brink of death. In return for such information he received gifts, which decreased in value, however, as the Bey made sure of him. In this way Saïd Bey learnt of a plot to assassinate the noble and disinterested Muhammad Hâfiz—a plot so horrible as to appal the very leaders in conspiracy, who had themselves given secret warning to the intended victim, enabling him to find safety in flight. This news seemed to His Excellency so momentous that within an hour of hearing it he set out in person for Iskenderîyeh, where the Court then was. He performed the journey in a fluster of concern which threatened every instant to cut short his days; and on his return the following evening to the capital, he sent at once for Mabrûk and assured him it was all too true. The Sayyid had taken refuge in the noble city of El Cuds, and from thence had written to one of the Ministers a letter which confirmed

Mabrûk's report. On this occasion he omitted altogether to fee Mabrûk, nor did he thenceforth make him any remuneration beyond the promise of his protection and interest.

This story of Muhammad Hâfiz was one of a multitude of devices employed about this time by the Turk for striking terror in the hearts of the Court party; but from the accidental manner of its conception, which gave it all the colouring of truth, it proved effective. As its good results became apparent, Omar praised Allah more and more for his henchman's cleverness. He would stare at Mabrûk for minutes together, saying: "Who would suppose a devil lurked beneath that mean exterior?" Nourished on such encomiums, Mabrûk soon came to believe himself a fiend indeed. His face and manner nowadays denoted subtlety, and a malicious smile was seldom absent from the corners of his mouth. In imitation of his chief, he bought a rosary, and told the beads thereof, with eyes downcast, when momentarily at a loss for words. The love of disguise, which had taken him at first through cowardice, now grew to mania through excess of guile. He even, on one occasion, borrowed raiment from Zeynab, and set forth in the likeness of a woman; but before he had gone many steps such laughter followed him, that, seized with horror and alarm, he fled indoors.

His patron now received him in the closest intimacy, and showed him the whole outlook of the revolutionary party; and the young man was astounded by the daring of the schemes thus

spread before him. Till now he had supposed himself the only agent employed by Omar; but now he grew aware of hosts of others. The Turk had spies even in the Prince's chamber, spies upon his enemies, spies upon his friends, spies upon his spies. All the plans of the reputed leaders seemed to be either inspired or else revised by him. Mabrûk heard at one moment of a secret embassy to the desert Arabs, eternal terror of the land of Egypt, with a view to alliance; at the next, of negotiations with an impressionable section of the Europeans. He saw the process by which ills which had hitherto been regarded as natural, and from the hand of Allah, were elevated into grievances and laid at the door of the Government; and, convinced of the power of Omar, grew more than ever eager in his service.

That the great mass of the people should remain indifferent was only to be expected, and troubled nobody. When once the army and the city mob were theirs entirely, the reformers would be courted by the Ulema and the great notables, and become the virtual lords of Egypt.

In the city generally there was a feeling that interference by infidels with the government of a Muslim land was impious and unjustifiable; and Riâz Pasha and his Cabinet were not popular, being regarded as creatures of the French and English. The Council of Notables had of late been much neglected, and the members, grieved by their loss of importance in the public eye, desired to reassert its former influence. The days of

Ismaîl Pasha, when an easy corruption reigned in all departments, were remembered as a golden age by many persons. The young and ambitious resented the calm superiority of the Turks, and their monopoly of the higher posts in the Administration. These and other causes combined to clothe the figure of the peasant-soldier, standing forth with his cry of "Egypt for the Egyptians," with charms for not a few outside the army. But their sympathy was speculative, and wholly passive. For action, it was necessary either to convince each individual that he personally stood to gain by a change of government, or else to furnish a display of power so formidable as to set the whole world cringing.

Mabrûk saw all this through his master's eyes more clearly than was pleasant to him. To use the same measure for friends as for enemies, which Omar did invariably, seemed to him injustice. Indeed, while working for revolution with unsparing zeal, the Turk had a sneer for the cause, and all to do with it. He esteemed no one in Egypt, unless it were the Khedive, and other Turks by race, whom it was his business to oppose. But Mabrûk was less shocked by this disdain for the children of the Nile than he was awed by the great man's pitiless exposure of the motives underlying the enthusiasm of his closest friends. That, surely, was a scrutiny best left to Allah. It took an Osmanli thus to even friend with foe, and keep his wits collected amid so much fervour.

For all the sons of Egypt those were days of

nerve-racking excitement, of vague and maddening apprehensions, when no man dared to glance beyond the moment, and small events were magnified to ghastly horrors. An incident which had occurred at Iskenderîyeh perturbed the minds of men of all opinions, and was made to bear a significance it could never have assumed in times of order. A soldier of the artillery having been knocked down and injured by the carriage of a foreign merchant, his comrades gathered him up and carried him in a crowd to the palace of Râs-et-Tîn with cries for justice. The Khedive spoke kindly to the demonstrators, and appeased their wrath; but after a few days, when they had forgotten the whole business, he had their leaders brought to trial on a charge of mutiny, and condemned: the victim of the accident to penal servitude for life; his eight bearers to three years' imprisonment, to be succeeded by foreign service in the dreaded Sûdân.

Abdul Aâl Hilmi, one of the revolutionary leaders, sent to Mahmûd Sâmi, Minister of War, a violent protest against the inhumanity of this judgment; Arâbi and the rest cried "treachery"; Abdullah Nadîm, in his newspaper, thundered against the tyrant; and there was a general impression in the capital that the end of all things was at hand. The outcry was embittered by the chance that the month was Ramadân—a mid-summer Ramadân—when street-cries are hushed, and the mildest are rendered irascible by discomfort of a parched mouth and an empty belly. But its result was the opposite of that intended. It

scared the Khedive in truth, but so exceedingly as to nerve him to yet stronger action. The Ministry was summoned by telegraph to Iskenderîyeh; Mahmûd Sâmi, Arâbi's partisan, was ejected from the War Department; and measures were concerted for silencing the incendiary press.

Omar Efendi chuckled at the consternation of the Nationalists, while by precept and example he strove to restore their confidence. It was now Arâbi's turn to be distraught with fear. If Muhammad Tewfik fully asserted himself, Ahmed Arâbi and all who had held with him were dead men. But something feverish and excessive, pointed out by onlookers, in the vigour of the Khedive's tactics, suggesting desperation of sheer terror rather than conscious might, gave the schemers hope that by some bold expedient they might yet reduce their Sovereign to obedience. For more than a month Arâbi and his friends took counsel nightly, shaping forth their project. By the time an order came for an exchange of troops between Iskenderîyeh and the capital, replacing a trusty regiment by one still attached to the Khedive, their plan was ripe. The order was ignored, and openly derided; and Arâbi sent to every regiment a list of complaints against the Government, that no soldier might rest unaware of grievances.

It was then that one fine evening Mabrûk attended Omar to a certain house, where Ahmed Arâbi sat in council with his intimates, on a chair at a table, in the latest manner. Mabrûk could not enough admire the grave demeanour of the con-

spirators, nor the elegance of the salutations with which they rose and welcomed the Osmanli. The famous peasant-soldier was a tall, thick-set man, deliberate and something ponderous, but urbane, and owner of a very pleasant smile. Tulbah Ismet, sitting next to him, seemed to Mabrûk a fox that guides a lion. Omar Efendi presented his attendant to the leader, saying:

"Thou didst hint, O my dear, some need of messengers. I commend to thee this rogue of mine, who may be trusted."

"Give him the letters for the citadel, and let him hasten," said Tulbah, who appeared in great excitement. "Riâz and his colleagues have sold us all to the Inklîz. Even the price is known," he added, to explain the urgency.

Ahmed Arâbi made Mabrûk draw near, and spoke to him kindly as he gave the letters. The messenger then kissed the gracious hand, and sped upon the errand.

Great events were brewing. Arâbi, Tulbah, Abdul Aâl, and the rest had judged the times ripe for a display of power. The leader had therefore sent to the Khedive a letter informing His Highness that, on the fifteenth of Shawwâl, by Allah's leave, the army would visit him at his palace of Abdîn to lay before him certain just demands. He wrote at the same time to the foreign consuls bidding them have no fear, since the proceedings would be marked with all urbanity.

Omar Efendi evinced distaste for this mode of trumpeting great deeds beforehand. It was like a fellâh, he sneered, to take his rôle thus seriously,

and strain at a dignity which the Sultan's self would laugh to contemplate; the blow, to be effective, should be sudden; all this fanfaronade was done by the advice of an irresponsible Frank; and so forth. But he lent Mabrûk to do the service of the conspirators, and showed indulgence for the youth's excitement.

On the morning of the fifteenth of Shawwâl, when Mabrûk presented himself as usual at the Turk's abode, he found his patron dressed as for the street. The great man took his hand at once, and led him forth, saying:

"Thou wouldst not miss the sight, I know. We go together."

It was the first time that Mabrûk had been thus honoured, in his pleasure, and he choked with pride.

The day was Friday, so a public holiday, and the inhabitants of the capital strain always for a peep at every show. A huge crowd of sight-seers of all classes filled the square before the palace of Abdîn, rustling with conversation like a cornfield in the breeze. Sellers of water and other comforts picked a slow way through the mass. Rather to Mabrûk's disgust his patron chose to mingle with the herd. He had hoped through him for some exclusive standpoint, where his greatness might be seen of all beholders. This regret was sharpened in his mind when 'Ala'd-dîn, crying sweetmeats, stopped and spoke with him a moment, unconscious of the great man at his elbow.

The demands which Arâbi would present were

known and freely canvassed by the joking crowd. They were first, the resignation of the present Ministry; then an increase of the army, the promotion of his bosom friends, especially Tulbah; the repeal of certain laws dishonouring to the Egyptian soldiers, the rehabilitation of the Chamber of Deputies, the downfall of the Sheykh el-Islâm. Each clause found friends and opponents among the merry-makers, and the arguments raged and fell amid much laughter.

Soon the troops began to arrive. The spectators named the leaders as they recognized them. First came the cavalry of Ahmed Bey Abdul-Ghaffâr. Then the regiment of Ahmed Arâbi, and then a regiment of artillery, under Ismaîl Bey Sabri. An army of three thousand men, under discipline, with arms flashing in the sun, was drawn up before the palace of Abdîn, where the consuls of the Powers and all the Ministers were known to be in council with the Sovereign. Then a murmur ran through all the crowd. The Khedive Muhammad Tewfik had come forth to the entrance of the palace, with the foreign consuls at his back. He gave some orders, which the crowd could soon interpret, for Arâbi rode up to the portal, sitting stiff and upright on his charger, drawn sword in hand; around him ten high officers, likewise mounted and with swords drawn. The leader saluted. At the bidding of the Khedive he sheathed his sword, and dismounted. The Khedive conversed with him, the consul of the English standing very near—a piece of impudence which the crowd took for proof of what was said about

the sale of Egypt to the English. Then the whole group of great ones entered the palace, and were lost to sight.

"There is no more to see; the result will be heard afar," said Omar Efendi in Mabrûk's ear. "If thou wilt, we will go and take refreshment."

Extricating himself from the press by force of good-humour, he led Mabrûk to a certain tavern, the resort of great ones, where he regaled him upon such dainties as the poor good youth had seldom tasted. Pashas and Beys were among their neighbours at the meal, and they all took notice of the Turk's companion. It was the proudest day of Mabrûk's life.

After three hours, shouts were heard in the street, and a slave belonging to one of those great ones rushed in, panting, to relate that the downfall of the Ministry and Tulbah's promotion had been conceded, that the Khedive had sworn to consider favourably the rest of the demands, and, after consultation with the Sultan's Majesty, to grant them one by one, as he judged politic. Sherîf Pasha was charged with the formation of the new Ministry. All gave praise to Allah, for great had been the fear of a disturbance. The music of the regiments could be heard in the distance, as the troops returned to their respective quarters.

"What I most admire in this business," said Mabrûk to his chief, with tears of real enthusiasm, "is the urbanity which has characterized the whole proceeding. Here have been no uncouth insults, no indignities. All has been done politely, in the latest manner. They say Arâbi asked

nothing for himself, but spoke only as representing the army and the Council of Notables. Allah witness, what magnanimity! What refined strategy."

"Clever enough, as it happens," said the Turk, laughing, "but there remains in our dear one a vein of strong credulity, which will be his ruin. Save for that, he would have asked the will of the Successor of the Prophet, instead of lending ear to the disquisitions of some renegade Franks."

Mabrûk kept silence, deferentially; though, after the display of power that day, there was no longer any doubt in his mind but that Arâbi was the noblest of all living men.

CHAPTER XXVI

That evening, by his lord's suggestion, Mabrûk went to a certain coffee-tavern, the resort of quiet men, to overhear the talk which passed there. Customers sat on stools in an open place beside the street, while the host and his assistants loitered in and out of a little chamber, hollowed in the massive outer wall of a great mosque, where glowed the brazier. A lantern hanging in the entrance to this little cave, with others in the hands of passers-by, furnished what light there was, except that of the moon, which the high mosque wall debarred from all the company.

These were men for whom the new ideas were nonsense; the Frankish dress and ways, an affectation; the talk of progress, a bad joke. That a thing was useful or expedient was no recommendation; they asked at once, Has it the sanction of God's word or sound tradition, or was this thing revealed in sleep to any seer? On the strife of ambition they smiled pityingly, and harboured a gentle contempt for the great as this world reckons.

That night they were very guarded in their converse, as men too shocked as yet to trust

their judgment. Mabrûk learnt nothing from them, nor from anyone else, until the morrow, when, again by Omar's suggestion, he accompanied a funeral out to the southern cemetery.

The deceased, a rich and respected merchant, had come to be ranked with the learned for the sake of his varied travels and his great good sense. The most intelligent of the sober citizens followed his corpse to the grave, and sat in the tent close by till after nightfall, hearing readings from the august Corân, and partaking of refreshments. Mabrûk returned to the city in the starlight with a group of men, to whom he was a stranger. From his dress and bearing, they judged him, like themselves, a man of substance, from whom there was nothing to fear. These cursed Arâbi roundly as they went along, and asked Allah to give strength to Tewfik's arm. His success, which they prayed God to prevent, would mean mere licence for the soldiery, a return to the bad old times of the Memlûk Beys, when many soldier lords kept state in Masr, and fought with armies one against another. For Arâbi, they declared, was a good sort of man, neither clever nor cruel enough to control the forces he had set in motion. Their hope was that the Sultan would interfere, and so avert the prospect of a reign of terror.

When Mabrûk retailed their talk to Omar Efendi, the latter rubbed his nose, and seemed much pleased with it. He said those wiseacres were in the right to look to Istanbûl for deliverance. The Sultan would rescue them, but not

until the Khedive had been deposed, and they had enjoyed their taste of "Egypt for the Egyptians."

As a consequence of the affair of Abdîn, Ahmed Arâbi and some of his most prominent supporters had been given high commands in the provinces. The leader himself was now at Râs-el-Wâdi, where he employed his time in extending his influence among the desert Arabs—a pursuit which, when it came to the knowledge of the Khedive, would, he knew, ensure his immediate recall. Mabrûk was told to drop a word of his sly doings in the ears of Saïd Bey Ramadân and other talkatives, and point to the probability of an Arab rising if the peasant soldier were kept longer in retirement.

With such avocations Mabrûk was often absent from his home for days together. At his request the wife of 'Ala'd-dîn went every day to sit and chat with Zeynab, and 'Ala'd-dîn himself would call, whenever he had time to spare, to take the child, on whom he doted, out for an airing. At first Zeynab had murmured much at the rudeness of their fellow-lodger, telling how, when crossing on the stairs, he tried to hold her, and, passing by her door, spoke words of love. Mabrûk ascertained the times of his coming and going, and bade her shun those hours, and keep the door well fastened. The old Nubian, also, sharing his annoyance, had sworn to see that she went unmolested. Since then her complaints had ceased, and he had felt at ease concerning her.

But one morning in the season of the inundation, returning unexpectedly to his lodging, he

heard from the foot of the stairs his wife vituperating some male being, promising to make him smart if he did that again. The speech concluded with a merry laugh. Mabrûk had been suddenly told to prepare for a journey to Iskenderîyeh. He had brought with him 'Ala'd-dîn and a porter to help with the baggage. At the woman's cry he sprang ahead of his companions. On the landing stood Zeynab, with veil displaced, staring upward to the floor above, where dwelt the Circassian. She showed confusion, and made no resistance when he caught her by the arm and dragged her into their apartment. There, forgetting decency, he took a stick and beat her furiously before 'Ala'd-dîn and the porter could prevent him.

"By Allah, by the Sayyid Ahmed el-Bedawi, I have done no wrong!" she shrieked. "Hold him fast, O 'Ala'd-dîn, or he will kill me. He is mad! He will kill his own child and earn the curse of Allah. It is all the fault of that profligate who pulled my veil and at the same time spoke a word that made me laugh, so that I was angry and amused together."

"Thou liest, O accursed!" roared Mabrûk, and spat at her. "Allah witness, I divorce thee, I divorce thee thrice!"

"What words are these?" cried 'Ala'd-dîn, in utmost horror. "I ask pardon of Allah! Divorce is serious. But there are no witnesses! We have heard nothing. Is it not so, O man?"

"Not a sound nor a word," replied the porter, with a cordial grin.

"I am divorced and threefold; Mabrûk has said it! Am I the daughter of nothing to be thus ill-treated? His father paid full sixty pounds for me, I would have it known. And Allah knows I have not wronged him in the least."

There was sincerity in her tone. Mabrûk, already ashamed of his indecent outburst, busied himself, for countenance, in preparations for his journey. When 'Ala'd-dîn and the porter had gone, he stayed behind a moment to demand forgiveness, and gave her money for her living in his absence, which was not likely to be prolonged. But her response was inarticulate.

CHAPTER XXVII

In the busy mart of Iskenderîyeh, between the still lake and the restless sea, Mabrûk tarried day after day, attendant on the whim of his patron, who was in no haste to return to El Mahrûseh. The Turk did not hide the cause of his reluctance, which was the presence in the capital of an accredited mission from the Porte, sent, contrary to his advice, to win the Nationalists—a false step which would lower the Sovereign Power in the eyes of the people of Egypt to no purpose, since the fruit was not yet ripe. Omar's own judgment, carefully matured upon the spot, had been for the Sultan to let rebellion do its work unfettered; and then, when anarchy prevailed, and all the world cried out upon the state of Egypt, to step in nobly in the cause of order. The present rash impatience of the High Government, upsetting well-laid schemes, incensed him greatly. He animadverted, too, upon the insolence of Arâbi, which in the last few weeks, he said, was grown ungovernable; but that, Mabrûk perceived, was only jealousy of the influence obtained by certain Franks.

As Omar had prophesied, the Turkish Mission returned discomfited. But still he did not budge

from Iskenderîyeh. He continued to serve the cause of revolution, but lazily, and as if for his own amusement. In the character of a free-thinking and enlightened person he ingratiated himself with Franks and Greeks and Syrians, who were the virtual lords of the seaport as controllers of its commerce. He received and visited such infidels on a footing of complete equality, and ate and drank abomination with the worst of them. To accord with this new turn, he made Mabrûk don Frankish clothes and quit the turban.

As winter drew on, the young man suffered much from the cold, which here was damp and had a filthy taste of brine, elsewhere unknown. The life of the town displeased him by its suggestion of unrest, of ceaseless voyaging; and, from a day when he adventured with his patron in an open boat outside the breakwater, the sea was hateful to him. He lay and writhed in the bottom of the skiff, calling on Allah Most High to end his torments. It was as if one ginni stirred his belly with a spoon, while several others got beneath the boat and shook and rolled it. From that experience he derived new admiration for the mercy of Allah, who had let the land strike root, and so ensured for men a happier lot than that of fishes.

He inhabited with his lord a palace on the shore towards Ramleh, placed at Omar's disposal by a notable whose summer house it was. His employment was now strictly secretarial; and most of the letters he was called upon to indite were in the French language, which the Turk

spoke well, but wrote indifferently. Omar's business here was to scare the foreign merchants, that the sight of their terror might embolden men to smite them. But, though fitfully interested in this new game, Mabrûk missed the freedom he had enjoyed in the capital, and longed to see again his wife and little son. Moreover, money was not thrust into his hand as formerly; his lord now dealt with Franks who have no manners. But, in compensation, he was now his lord's chief friend, accompanying him in his outings, and eating at his table. Omar Efendi deigned to sup, and even dance, at the houses of his friends, the Frankish merchants. Returning late at night from these orgies, he would sometimes rouse his scribe, impatient to relate some striking incident.

"Wallahi, O Mabrûk, their girls are something nice! This evening, at the meal, I sat next one of them—a virgin, by the Prophet! and like the moon on the night of her fulness for perfection of beauty. Had she been mine or thine, we should have kept her hidden, and surrounded her apartments with a guard of stone-dumb eunuchs. Yet these men set her close to me, our knees in contact. A pearl, I tell thee, worthy of imprisonment! By thy life, I felt ashamed for her, the sweet one! But these Franks are all alike, devoid of decency. I was in Paris once, and witnessed many marvels. There vile harlots are enthroned, and the low singers and dancers, who but minister to our amusement, are more honoured and esteemed than princes."

Mabrûk valued these confidences above State

secrets. They warmed his heart to the Turk, showing him human. One morning, when they had been indulging in such talk, he ventured to present to his chief the romance of Sharlas and Kamîl, which he still treasured. He apologized for the soiled condition of the copy. His Honour thanked him for it, and read therein with some avidity.

"By Allah, it is the very life!" he told Mabrûk. "Just so do they spoil their women. Imagine a betrothal lasting more than a year, with free intercourse between the parties! The men endure it, which shows how cold their blood is. And the women take advantage of their tameness and control them—artful there as here. A mad race!"

Encouraged by the success of his present, and his lord's good-humour, Mabrûk dared to mention his need of money to support his wife and child. He had feared that the request would anger Omar; but his lord received it as a thing of course, and, having ascertained the sum required, at once produced it; whereupon Mabrûk would have exhausted himself in gratitude had not the Turk, in his old sneering manner, bidden him keep some of his thanks for future occasions, unless he had now got all he required, which was not likely.

More than two-thirds of the sum thus given him Mabrûk forwarded through the post to 'Ala'd-dîn for the maintenance of Zeynab. He sent with the remittance a letter to the effect that, since the period of his absence remained indefinite,

his wife might, if she chose, go back to the village.

In due time he got an answer from his friend and factotum, written by a public scribe, acknowledging the receipt of the money, and informing him that his lady preferred to stay where she was. Enclosed was a missive from his father, also the handiwork of a professional letter-writer.

The Sheykh Mustafa enlarged upon the defects of the Sheykh Mahrûs as omdeh, vouchsafing details of his evil-doing. He had heard by the voice of honourable rumour that the apple of his eye, his dear Mabrûk, was ennobled by the friendship of a great man, who possessed strong influence with the new rulers. He desired that his son would convey to the mighty and munificent prince who now possessed the land in all but name some knowledge of the incapacity of old Mahrûs, and of his own superior qualifications for the post of headman; and concluded with the assurance of his perfect devotion and obedience to the lightest breath exhaled by the mouth of His Glorious Highness Arâbi Bey, and every one of his brave companions in rebellion.

At the first opportunity Mabrûk showed this letter to his patron, who chuckled over it.

"Thy father, is it?" he remarked. "Well, let the old man have his wish. It is well that the new power should be felt even in remote villages, that men may cease to look to the Khedive. Write to Arâbi all that pleases thee, and bring the letter hither for my signature."

Again Mabrûk would have exhausted thanks,

but his patron bade him save some for the next occasion.

The collapse of Sherîf Pasha's Cabinet, which had lately seemed to favour the Europeans, and the appointment in its stead of a Nationalist Ministry with Mahmûd Sâmi at its head and Ahmed Arâbi in charge of the War Department, caused rejoicing throughout Egypt. People judged the agitation at an end, since all Arâbi's claims were more than satisfied. The new Minister of War was loud in his professions of gratitude to the Sovereign, and "Praise to Allah!" was the general cry. Deputations from all the provinces waited upon the Khedive with thanks for his unselfishness in giving way to the disturbers for the sake of peace. But Omar told Mabrûk to wait a little. Arâbi had proved his strength when out of office, and now he had got control of all the resources of the country. So long as the Khedive was docile, all might be well; but at the first resistance affairs would be worse than ever.

Omar Efendi was dissatisfied with the result of his mission to the foreign traders in Iskenderîyeh. With the Greeks and the Syrians he had succeeded well enough, if not quite to the height of his desires. They took alarm at his repeated warnings, and nearly all prepared for flight at a moment's notice. In truth, the murmurs of the native population were loud enough to justify extreme precaution. Apart from Arâbi's agitation, the seizure of Tunis by the French without declaration of war and their occupation of the sacred city of Cairwân had angered all men against the

infidels. But certain of the influential French and English merchants ridiculed the thought of danger, and their attitude inspired the smaller men with confidence. There was one sheykh in particular, rosy-cheeked and bright of eye, high-spirited as a boy beneath his snow-white hair, who, believing the Turk to be himself in deadly terror, was at pains to reassure him.

"Your Excellency is too timorous," he said more than once in Mabrûk's hearing. "Now I know these people, and I guarantee your Excellency safer here than in Stambûl. They are not like you Turks or us English. By big talk they imagine themselves to be brave, but at heart they are cowards, every one of them. Be not afraid!"

What was to be done with men like that? Omar Efendi shrugged his shoulders and spat eloquently. If they met a violent death, whose fault would it be?

There seemed little more that he could do for the furtherance of revolution. He began to speak of returning to the shores of the Bosphorus, where he had a father and a brother who loved him, besides many enemies who required looking after. Moreover, he wished personally to expound the meaning of the policy which he espoused for Egypt, which had been misrepresented in the ear of Power.

"What will become of me?" sighed Mabrûk feelingly on these tidings. "Deprived of thee, I shall walk in darkness, I shall stumble and fall. Thou art my father and my mother. Take me with thee, I beseech thee, O my lord!"

Omar shook his head at that, but promised, notwithstanding, to take thought for him.

"Thou must be a soldier once again," he said one day, when they had been together to the post to ask for letters.

At that Mabrûk cried out in fear to Allah, but Omar by a gesture bade him wait a minute.

"I have here the permission for thee to assume the rank and style of a mulâzim. For instruction in the duties thou wilt go every day to Fort Adda, where the commandant is my friend, returning in the evening to my house. By Allah, I love thee too well to wish to part with thee before it is decreed. Desist, I pray thee"—Mabrûk was kissing the hem of the Turk's frock-coat in the public street—"it is not seemly for thee, being now an officer."

Just before this speech of his patron it had been in Mabrûk's mind to ask for leave to go and visit his wife and little son, but now the desire, with all others, was lost in dancing joy at his high preferment. So it happened that the spring of the year found him still in Iskenderîyeh, and content to stay there.

Supplied with money by his patron, he procured his uniform, and arrayed in it, paced the streets with infinite self-complacency. He took delight, too, in the tricks of drill, and was soon able to perform them nimbly, to the satisfaction of his instructors. It warmed his heart to order men about like dogs, and beat the stupid ones with his cane. He himself had been ordered about and caned—a fact which gave his present work a taste of justice.

Recruiting on a grand scale was going on throughout the whole of Egypt, spreading grief and desolation among the villages. The army was to be raised at one bound to twice its former strength.

Ahmed Arâbi was now made Pasha, and ruled the War Department. All the news from the capital told of his greatness. The Council of Notables and a majority of the Learned looked to him, while the Khedive was submissive, and avoided grounds of quarrels. In truth he was become the lord of Egypt, and Mabrûk, as the protégé of a friend of his, was cherished as the apple of an eye by his new comrades. In the way of so much honour, he came near to resent the patronizing talk of Omar. The Turk saw this, and smiled a little sadly.

"So I am done with, am I?" he observed on one occasion. "You are all alike, you fellahîn. Arâbi is the same. Wise enough in adversity, in success you gaze on nothing but your own glory, so are blinded. None the less, may Allah preserve thee! I am finished in so far as Masr is concerned. Dervîsh Pasha is sent hither with a mission to enslave Arâbi. It is simply to repeat the failure of last autumn. His Mightiness is to be invested with the highest order of the Mejidîyeh. Pshaw! May Allah destroy the intellects which devise such folly!"

Mabrûk, who once had listened awestruck to this talk, now, full of the arguments of his new comrades, was apt to quarrel with his friend's conclusions. Ahmed Arâbi was a great man and

powerful; the Egyptians were a glorious people, distinguished especially in the art of war, as witness the conquests of the mighty Rameses. The Governments of Europe did wrong to despise them as uncivilized, and claim privileges for their subjects here in Egypt which were only justifiable in a country wholly barbarous. The Franks needed to be taught that the Egyptians were their lords in all urbanity, and would, perhaps, take that lesson to heart when all their subjects in the land were slain or driven forth.

The Turk's perpetual smile at his credulity exasperated the young officer. To keep his temper he had constantly to remind himself that the kill-joy was soon to depart.

CHAPTER XXVIII

One afternoon, as he returned from the fort, Mabrûk happened to traverse a street of high old houses leading up from the harbour. The placards of the various shops were in Arabic, Greek, and Italian, indicating a mixed population. The sun, though declining, still retained his heat, and Mabrûk was walking on the shady side, when something struck his fez lightly and, rebounding, fell upon the ground before him. It was a rosebud.

Looking up, he saw an unveiled face at a window just above him—a lovely face, which smiled, and motioned towards a certain doorway. The quarter, so far as he knew, was one of commerce, not of evil fame; nevertheless, he sent a keen glance up and down the street and at the opposite shops, to make sure that no one watched his movements with particular interest, before diving into the entry, which he did precipitately, holding up his sword to prevent its clanking. He bounded up a squalid flight of stairs. On the first landing, in the semi-darkness, his hand was grasped, and pressed to a warm bosom. A delicious scent enveloped him. He

was drawn into a room made shady by Venetian blinds.

At length he dared to study the face of the girl caressing him, and saw that it was Helweh, the pretty dancer, for whom Rashîd had lost his mind at Tanta. Suspecting a trap, he sprang back in alarm.

"Merciful Allah! is it thou?" he cried.

"Of course it is I!" laughed the girl, still clinging to him; and perceiving that she had no recollection, Mabrûk laughed with her, blessing the lucky day.

"I saw thee pass yesterday at this hour," she told him, "and my soul went out to thee, for thou art a lovely man, thou knowest, owner of all perfection in the way of beauty; so this evening, when I saw thee once again, my passion prompted me to make a sign to thee. Now I will never let thee go. Thou art my love for ever!"

She set before him food of her own preparing, and coaxed his soul to eat by close endearments, talking all the while in a voice as charming as the song of birds.

"Thou art an officer, O my soul, and wilt protect me—not so? At Shemm-en-Nessîm the wicked ones among the Muslimîn have sworn to slaughter us. That is well known. All talk of it, and those escape who can afford to do so. But as for me, I am a poor girl, without wealth or influence. I have but one in all this land to help me, and that is my brother, who is the trusted clerk of a rich banker here. Alas! he shares my danger, for his lord has fled to Europe,

leaving him in charge of the bank and all its contents. For the love of Allah, O my soul's delight, save him, save my brother also!"

"What like is this brother of thine? Does he in aught resemble thee?" inquired Mabrûk, struck with a presentiment.

"Not much," she replied coquettishly, kneeling down before him. "For one thing he is a man, and has a great moustache—black, black as night. Moreover, his eyes are dark, like thine, while mine are blue." She marked each feature, as she named it, upon his face with playful finger. Mabrûk, quite enslaved by her blandishments, undertook to protect her brother. He would have promised to swallow the moon had she required it. "But why dost thou ask if he resembles me?" she questioned.

"For little reason. Thy face recalled to me the face of a man I saw at Tanta lately."

"My brother was at Tanta, but not lately. It was last year, at the season of the Lesser Môlid. At that time he journeyed among the towns of the Delta, on a mission from his employer to see if there were any prospects for a bank among them. Ah, the poor one! He was robbed and left for dead by mad fanatics. This land is no good place for us poor Nazarenes. Many a time have Habîb and I wished to be back in Beyrût, which, notwithstanding, Allah knows, is bad enough. With thy leave, O my dear one, I shall go and fetch my brother. He dwells not far from here. He shall stay but a minute, that thou mayest know his likeness. Promise to

abide my return; I adjure thee by Our Lady Miriam!"

Mabrûk consented, glad that it was growing dusk, and that his appearance was now completely changed from that of the fellâh who had attacked and robbed men on the dyke by Kafr Zeyn. Helweh threw on her veil, and went out, leaving Mabrûk still troubled with her perfumes. Alone and waiting, he gave praise to Allah Most High, who had ordained that the robber should receive the homage of the man robbed, and have the chance to do him some slight kindness.

Helweh soon returned with the man whose face had come between Mabrûk and sleep so many nights, for fear of whom the young fellâh had joined the soldiers, and so set out upon the road to fortune. That man now approached him with the profoundest reverence, kissing his hand, and afterwards standing in his presence with hands concealed, and eyes downcast, till commanded to sit down.

"Said I not, O Habîb, I would find thee a protector?" said his sister, fondly, as she doffed her head-veil. "She is of some use, poor Helweh, although thou art ashamed to call her sister. She could not bear to see thee in such terror."

Her brother soon departed, thanking Allah for the officer's unheard-of kindness; and Helweh flung herself into the arms of Mabrûk, who spent the night with her.

Going forth into the early morning sunlight, he felt some remorse for misconduct so ill-becoming a true believer. He thought with longing of his

wife Zeynab. She was not now so fair as when he used to court her of an evening in the village cemetery beside the shrine of Selîm the Donkey-driver; but what matter, since she loved him with her whole being. The very lines upon her face, her growing fatness, appealed to him now. In particular, and with a sort of anguish, he recalled the little tree, tattooed in green beneath her under-lip, which added to her appearance the beauty of a constant pout.

After all, why should he not return for a night to El Câhireh? He had neglected the dear one shamefully. The distance was not insuperable, and officers travelled at a reduction on the iron road. The desire became a purpose. He made haste to the fort, and there craved leave of absence, which was given, of course, to such a favourite. Then, having borrowed sufficient money from a comrade, he repaired to the railway-station.

An hour before sunset he was again in the victorious city; but, happening to fall in with a friend, who, made servile by his uniform, insisted on his drinking two cups of coffee, he did not approach his home till after nightfall.

"Unto whom, O Excellency?" asked the old Nubian, seated at the outer door.

"Unto my house, my spouse," replied Mabrûk, with a laugh; for the doorkeeper had failed to recognize him.

"Ah, now I know thee! Welcome, O my dear! But what is thy desire? Thou knowest, none better, that thy house is empty, that she, who was thy spouse, was lawfully married to the Circassian

weeks ago. A blessing for the neighbours, who are no more afraid."

"O Abû Farrâg! O Allah!" Mabrûk sank back against the doorpost. The next minute he sprang erect, and swore to go at once and slay those wicked ones. He cursed the day that he was born.

The doorkeeper flung his arms round him, and held him fast, bidding a little boy, who sat with him, run like lightning for 'Ala'd-dîn, the vendor of sweetstuff.

"Shame on thee, O my lord!" he said to the struggling officer. "What words are these? Is it not known thou didst divorce her threefold? The girl has done no wrong. She completed her period of separation before remarrying. Thy son she gave in charge to the wife of thy friend 'Ala'd-dîn. It is a sin for thee to wish to kill her."

But Mabrûk only raved the more, calling his wife bad names, and swearing to kill her, together with the hog her paramour. A little crowd, attracted by his furious shouts, asked Allah to heal him of his madness. At length 'Ala'd-dîn came, running, and, urging on Mabrûk the impropriety of such an outcry in a place so public, dragged him to his own house. There, in the humble room, the madman cast himself upon the ground in sullen fury, while the sweetmeat-seller and his wife said prayers over him, and recited such passages of the Corân as they possessed by heart. At length he cried:

"O false friend! O accursed! Why didst thou keep this hid from me?"

"Allah forbid that I should be the vehicle of evil news!" was the reply. "Besides, I myself was a witness of the divorce, and when thou didst not return, both I and she supposed thee earnest in the matter. Thou sentest money, that is true, as thou sayest; but we supposed that the money was to support her during her 'emmeh."

But the demonstration that the blame was his only increased Mabrûk's dudgeon.

"I will show him his son!" cried the wife of 'Ala'd-dîn. "The sight of the little one will heal his mind. Ma sh' Allah! See how plump he is! Look, what a noble child!"

But Mabrûk could not bear to gaze just then upon his offspring. With muttered thanks to the couple for their generosity, he hurried forth into the night.

CHAPTER XXIX

Mabrûk wandered, aimless, the drum of his own anger beating loud in his ears. It was moonlight, and the shadows of the high irregular houses assumed fantastic shapes. Each arch and buttress trenching on the narrow streets seemed an enemy intent to bar his way; each sudden gleam of moonlight seemed a sword. He walked in a world of terror, unafraid, he so desired to die and end his torments. A dog flew snarling at him and he kicked it savagely, exulting in its wounded shriek as it slunk off. Watchmen, seeing his uniform, saluted, but he passed them by without a look.

He strode out beneath the massive arch of Bâb-en-Nâsr, and strayed for a while upon the sand beneath the desert hill. Dogs skulked amid a crowd of humble tombs, their shadows monstrous in the moonlight.

He turned back and traversed the sleeping city, till he stood once more before that house of sin. The old Nubian lay asleep, and snoring loudly on his couch before the door. Mabrûk quickly imagined that he had bound and gagged the warder where he lay, had taken the key from him, and crept

up the stairs, drawn sword in hand; that he had entered the apartment of the Circassian without a sound, and struck off the heads of the guilty pair as they slept in each other's arms. Then, with a sigh of disillusionment, he resumed his wandering.

That Zeynab should have chosen a man so warlike, of whom he was afraid, for his supplanter, made her guilt more frightful. Realizing that he was but a child as compared with that strong, fearless brute, he sank down in the darkness of a doorway and began to cry.

"Have mercy, O most noble, kind afrît!" wailed a scared voice in his ear. On the instant he became aware that he had sat upon a human foot, and asked forgiveness. But the diversion was too trifling to distract his thoughts. The foot released, he fell again to weeping, endeavouring to console his mind with pictures of how he would have dealt with a man his inferior in strength, had one ventured to approach Zeynab. Presently the same voice asked:

"O Monarch of the Age, why weepest thou so bitterly?" and, from the tone in which the words were uttered, it seemed the speaker was himself in tears.

"I ask pardon of Allah! Have I not cause to weep? Listen, O thou, and judge! I had been absent on a journey, and, returning to my house this night, I found my wife rejoicing in the embrace of one, my enemy."

"Oh, the wicked sinners! I behold them!" exclaimed the unseen listener with a chuckle.

"In sh' Allah, thou didst slay them perfectly, and give their meat to dogs!"

"I hewed their heads from off their trunks, and so left them. Yet, Allah knows, my grief is not abated."

"There is neither power nor might save in Allah the High, the Tremendous," said the voice very solemnly. "B'ismi'llah, let us go and bury their bodies!"

There was the noise of someone rising in the darkness, and a hand was stretched out towards Mabrûk, to raise him. He could not, in nature, repel such ready kindness. It was necessary that he should set forth with his unknown friend, and trust to chances of the way to shake him off.

Out in the moonlight his companion—who was clad as a fellâh, and tall and wild-looking—looked around him in excitement, groping with outstretched hands.

"Where—where is the house?" he cried, as if it had but now escaped him.

"It is far from here—across the river—towards Gîzeh!" lied Mabrûk, in the hope to discourage him.

"Y' Allah!" he bawled. "Let us haste, then; for the night is old, and our work must be complete ere dawn." And, squeezing Mabrûk's hand, he set off at a run in the direction indicated.

Soon he stopped, however, and staring at a breadth of shadow just in front of them, asked how, in the name of Allah, they were to climb over it. By this Mabrûk knew for certain that he was a victim of the drug hashîsh. He would

have withdrawn his hand, but the tall fellâh detained it with a grip of iron, saying:

"No; have confidence! Allah will show us a way. We are going to Gîzeh—not so? Think not I forget. To Gîzeh—ha, ha, ha!" And flinging back his head, he laughed aloud, starting a thousand echoes in that well-like place.

Mabrûk was obliged to submit, and follow the vagaries of his companion, who, having declared one shadow to be a cliff, and surmounted it by force of cunning, saw in the next a river, and caught up his robe. Yet he preserved some consciousness of direction, and often said: "To Gîzeh —not so? Think not I forget," as though resenting the suspicion of insanity. In the modern quarter the streets, being wide, presented fewer obstacles. But in the open space before the Khedive's Frankish playhouse, the hashshâsh stood still and stared about him wildly.

"All ways save one are closed," he whispered hoarsely. "One only is open, and I cannot find it."

Then, as though suddenly recollecting himself, he cried: "To Gîzeh, y' Allah! Think not I forget!" and set forward hotly as before.

Mabrûk had come to fear that he would never in this world get rid of him, when—just as they drew near the couchant lions cast in bronze which flank the entrance to the bridge across the Nile, and his companion had bidden him have no fear of them, for they were fast asleep—an owl flew out of a tree beside their path, and, hurtling near them, screeched as it sped by.

The hashshâsh sprang into the air, then stood

stock-still, as if petrified. His distended orbs swept the horizon for the enemy, then searched amid the dust of the roadway. All at once his gaze lighted on Mabrûk, whom, it seemed, he had not seen before; and with a yell, "Ya Muslimîn!" he flung up his arms, and ran back towards the city for dear life.

Mabrûk stood and watched him out of sight; then, with a sigh of relief, he went on across the bridge and down the shady avenue towards Gîzeh. Once more he was alone with his despair, and, absorbed in its contemplation, gave no thought to thieves, marauding Arabs, or other children of the night. Having walked for near an hour, he left the road, and followed a bank between fields of clover which smelt sweet. Seeing a village before him, and unwilling to go near and set the dogs a-barking, he sat down in the shelter of some reeds. With the cessation of movement great fatigue took hold of him. He stretched his length upon the ground and went to sleep.

He woke to see, across the whitening fields, the desert ridge and the pyramids blushing to the dawn against a deep blue sky, in which one big star shone with splendour. Stiffly he rose up and returned towards the city, of which only a dome and some minarets were seen amid the blushing mists, above what seemed an endless grove of trees. As he trudged up the great avenue, doves were chuckling and cooing among the branches overhead; the risen sun bedaubed the knotted trunks with red, and sprinkled jewels on the dewy foliage. As he paced across the long, low

bridge across the Nile, he saw the rapture of white sails upon blue water, and heard the transports of awaking life all down the river. But nothing moved him; he was an ill-used, hopeless man, who cried to Allah against all things earthly. He walked on through the outskirts of the town till he saw a carriage, and, hailing the driver, got in and was driven to the station.

On the long railway journey he held aloof from the talk of fellow-travellers, entrenching himself in a corner, where he sat staring out of the window, gnawing his lip in anger, till the train neared Tanta, when he brightened suddenly. A glimpse of the minarets of the Sayyid Ahmed's mosque reminded him of Helweh. The Syrian was far more lovely than Zeynab had ever been; and she boasted a refinement both in speech and action which brought her near to the high poetic model of female deportment, the incomparable Kamîl. He repented of having given that book to Omar Efendi; it would have served to beguile him now.

CHAPTER XXX

Omar Efendi showed great joy at sight of Mabrûk, when the latter presented himself after an absence of three days and nights, beginning to fear that harm had come to him. To forestall questions, the young man confessed at once how, on a sudden longing, he had gone to see his wife, only to find her married to that bad Circassian.

"Allah comfort thee!" exclaimed the Turk, when all was told. "But wherefore, since thy heart is set on her, didst thou divorce the poor girl threefold before witnesses? Naturally, thy prolonged absence confirmed the sentence to her understanding. Thy plight seems hopeless at a glance; nevertheless, I do discern some hope for thee. Amîn Bey, being of the enemies of our Arâbi, may vanish suddenly."

He said no more upon the subject then; but a few days later, when all men talked of a conspiracy of the Khedive's Circassian officers against Ahmed Arâbi, he showed Mabrûk a column in a newspaper, bidding him read it carefully and reflect upon it. It told how the hateful and inhuman malefactors who had dared to speak evil of the hope and pride of Egypt were now,

happily, imprisoned in Casr en-Nîl, tasting some of the indignities they had designed for others. The noblest in the land seemed implicated; for Mabrûk saw many famous names, among them that of Osman Pasha Rafki, sometime Minister of War. The conspirators, forty-eight in all, being under orders to proceed to the garrisons of the far south, had planned to ruin and, as some said, kill Arâbi before starting. The plot had been discovered just in time.

Mabrûk was wondering why the Turk had bidden him read all this so particularly, when, happening to glance again along the list of names, his eye found that of Amîn Bey, his enemy. A court-martial had decreed the lifelong banishment of every one of the delinquents to the utmost savage parts of the inhuman Sûdân; but the Khedive refused to ratify so harsh a sentence; whereupon Arâbi and his colleagues, in their righteous anger, had threatened to make an end of the prince and his family, and had convened the Chamber of Deputies without his sanction.

"It is the quarrel which our friends have long been seeking," remarked the Turk, when Mabrûk had finished reading. "By refusing to confirm the judgment Muhammad Tewfik only offends the soldiery; he cannot save his friends. Whatever he may say or do, those men are finished; and so thy sometime spouse will be a widow. Amîn is hardly the man one would have chosen for a mustahàll; but, supposing thy desire is still towards the girl, he has served thee in that capacity."

Mabrûk would not make up his mind then and there; but he gave some thought to the matter, and wrote to 'Ala'd-dîn a letter of instructions. The sweetmeat-seller was to keep an eye upon Zeynab during her period of separation; and, if no fault appeared in her, was to employ some reputable matchmaker to lure her fancy back towards Mabrûk. In the meanwhile Mabrûk visited Helweh every day, and every day found new delights in her.

In those days the Sayyid Abdullah Nadîm was much in Iskenderîyeh, and often came after nightfall to the house of Omar. The saintly man showed joy at the sight of Mabrûk's fine uniform, saying, now, in sh' Allah, he would slay in the cause of uprightness and true religion instead of for earthly gain as heretofore. His mortified looks transfigured, he went on to speak of the downfall of unbelief, and the slaughter of its adherents soon to happen in the land. And Mabrûk paid some heed to the forecasts of the grim enthusiast, for the whole garrison was even then secretly preparing to lay low the infidels.

The Powers of Europe, through their consuls, clamoured for the resignation of the Nationalist Ministry, and Arâbi, Mahmûd Sâmi, and their colleagues were prepared to retire. But the army, with all who had gone too far in the way of rebellion to draw back comfortably, being in terror of their lives, resolved upon the leader's immediate return to power. Accordingly, at Iskenderîyeh, where was centred the wealth and influence of the Frank intruders, the cannon of the forts were

turned upon the foreign quarters; troops were told off by detachments, each with its appointed area, to wreck and plunder; and the Khedive's refusal to restore Arâbi would give the signal for tremendous devastation. The native quarter alone was to be respected, and guarded from chance incursions by a strong cordon.

Mabrûk, as a general favourite, easily obtained control of the party charged with the looting of the street where Helweh lived. He warned the girl to keep her brother with her, and then awaited the order to lay waste and pillage with the impatience of one restrained from a good work. Omar's foreboding that the Khedive would yield the point, that all this warlike ardour would be thrown away, seemed most unkind. For the whole garrison was in a flutter of excited preparation; the courage of the troops burned clear, like a cheerful fire. Yet disappointment came.

As Omar had foretold, the Khedive, threatened with such grave disorders, unless Arâbi were reinstated within twelve hours from the moment when the threatening telegram was handed in at Iskenderîyeh, gave way at once. The sighs of praise to Allah sent up by the troops in the seaport when the tidings reached them, showed how much of fear had lurked amid their martial fervour. But Mabrûk, for one, felt nothing but pure chagrin; he had so looked forward to the thanks of Helweh.

Although this plan for the abasement of the wicked had been kept secret, some word of it

must have leaked through to the Frankish consuls; for an English ironclad came to anchor before the town. The advent of the warship caused Helweh to cling faster than ever to Mabrûk in terror, though he assured her, by Allah, that all fear was past; and when, ten days later, five more ironclads arrived, her tremors increased proportionately. The danger to herself and Habîb must, she argued, be immense, since six warships were detailed for their protection.

From the fort where he went for training, Mabrûk observed the great sea-castles cumbering the outer harbour, and watched the stir of human life upon them. The garrison, officers and men alike, laughed at the folly of that empty show of power; for it was known that the admirals had orders not to fight. Galâdstûn and the French together had sworn a solemn oath to injure no man. The populace mocked the red-cheeked, foolish sailors when they came on shore, and cursed their religion in their very teeth. The news from the capital was of no peaceful kind. The Franks, by the mouth of their consuls, clamoured for the resignation of the Ministry and Arâbi's banishment, simply because the finances of the country had been rescued from the hands of their commissioners. Viewed in the light of that impertinence, the presence of the warships off the town became an insult to the minds of the Muslim inhabitants, the more deadly for being harmless. Did the Powers of Europe think, by mere pretence, to cow the spirit of brave men and true believers? Even respectable tradesmen

took to spitting when they passed a Nazarene; while the low blacks and Berberines followed Frankish ladies in the streets, cracking lewd jokes and singing filthy songs, which set the crowd a-laughing.

Mabrûk heard an exaggerated account of these insults from Helweh, who no longer dared to leave the house, but sat in her room all day, smoking a narghileh, munching sweetstuff, and praying between whiles. Still, he could not believe that the Christians were in serious danger. The Egyptians were urbane people: they would fight, if need were, with their army, in the latest manner, as they had purposed but now in case the Khedive proved refractory; a savage, fanatical outbreak was inconceivable among them. He talked in this strain to Omar Efendi, when the latter broached the subject one afternoon on his return from the fort. But the Turk shook his head, and smiled derisively.

"Thou art young, O my son, and youth sees what youth pleases. Thou hast not followed the sermons of His Reverence the Sayyid Abdullah Nadîm these days, as I have done, or thou wouldst not despise the ferocity of the Muslimîn of Iskenderîyeh. Abdullah is a man after my own heart, both as preacher and politician. He is all for old-fashioned methods, which are certainly the most effective. It is well that Arâbi has such a prophet in his counsels, to counteract the influence of his Frankish friends, whose urbanity Abdullah Nadîm condemns as truckling. For days past this saintly man has been blowing fire into

the hearts of the faithful in Iskenderîyeh, who are further agitated by a rumour that the Nazarenes design to slaughter them, under protection of the fleet. The fellahîn of Masr are a mild and peaceful folk, it may be; but the same cannot be said of the rabble in this seaport, composed of the sweepings of El Islâmîyeh. So, if thou wouldst keep thy word to protect thy dear one and her brother, it were well to take the needful steps immediately."

At that Mabrûk stared speechless at his patron, stunned by the exposure of his wealth of guile; for he himself had never mentioned Helweh or her brother to the Turk, nor breathed a word of his engagement towards them.

"Bring them both to this house this very night, for who knows what to-morrow may bring forth? Nay, look not so distrustful, I entreat thee. Dost think that I have trespassed on thy ground? Not so, for I employed a spy, and that a woman. Surely, thou are not jealous of a girl of her renown! Dost fear to have her in the house where I am? By the cloak of the Prophet, I will not go nigh her! Rooms enough stand empty; choose one or two of them, and lock the door on her."

Mabrûk, though downcast, did as he was told, and within an hour Helweh entered the house, and was shown upstairs to the rooms prepared for her. A little later, as the Turk and Mabrûk sat talking, they were disturbed by a violent dispute before the outer door. Both rushing forth, with eyes screwed up against the dazzle of

the sea ablaze with sunset, beheld the brother of Helweh in strife with two porters of the town over the price to be paid for the carriage of a good-sized box, wrapped round with matting. Sweat streamed in runnels down the faces of the two believers. One was screaming.

"Four piastres, all this distance, for a load like that? O hog! O Kâfir! Perhaps it contains the stinking dust of all thy defiled ancestors since the time of Nimrûd!" Catching sight of Omar Efendi and Mabrûk, the speaker changed his tone in a twinkling. Cringing, he showed the money in his hand, and whined most piteously. "Look, O Excellencies. We be poor, righteous men, dependent on the mercy of Allah. This for a load that would have sprained the back of Antar."

"By the Gospel, it contains but a few books and my personal belongings!" protested the Syrian, with hunted looks. The matting had drawn away from the box at one corner, and Mabrûk could see that it was made of iron.

Omar Efendi, out of his own purse, doubled the sum already given to the porters, who, still discontented, were going off, when a servant of the house who had lifted the box to carry it indoors, let it fall in despair, and called them back again.

"Five piastres, then," bargained the spokesman, angrily.

"Ten, in sh' Allah, and from my own small wealth. Anything rather than crack every joint in my body," replied the servant, staring wide-eyed at the box. "It contains a ginni, surely."

"It contains but a few books and my own personal belongings," murmured the Syrian, as if he knew no other words.

"I like not this friend of thine," said Omar Efendi, when Habîb and his precious box were safely housed. "If the girl is no better, I could wish thee rid of her. We show him kindness, yet he still distrusts us. Does he take us for the lowest of men, capable of despoiling a guest within our gates? By Allah! he deserves to lose that box of his, which certainly contains all the wealth of his master's bank. Yet he who welcomes pigs must brook defilement, and it will, at all events, be known that we sheltered the Christians."

On the morrow, at the seventh hour, as Arabs reckon, from the birth of daylight, came the dreaded outbreak. For days past the whole population had been in a state of extreme nervous tension, each party believing that the other had a mind for slaughter. Men heard their own heart-beats with apprehension, and a salutation seemed a blow miscarried. Where all was tinder, the lightest spark sufficed to make a blaze. A dispute, trifling in itself, and of the commonest, between a Maltese and an Arab donkey-boy, roused the Muslim mob. Hundreds of men, armed with nabbûts, patrolled the streets, beating to death every foreigner they could find, outraging women and girls, and stealing everything that they could lay their hands on. The Franks and Greeks defended themselves as best they could, killing many of

the Muslims. In some streets a battle raged, people firing from the windows on the passers-by. Yet, for all that, the soldiers, whose business it was to keep the peace, looked on inactive, with a shrug and a callous smile whenever some poor, half-killed wretch appealed to them. Mabrûk was quite appalled by the sight of such uncivilized fury, but his comrades at the fort heard the story with a shrug and a smile, which made his horror seem mere childish weakness.

They exclaimed: "It is not our business; it is from Allah. In sh' Allah, it will make the beasts more mannerly. It is their fault for treating us like savages."

He learnt that Omar Pasha Lutfi, the governor of the town, had called upon the chief of police to put an end to the disgraceful scenes; but the soldier replied that it was not his place to interfere without specific orders from his lord Arâbi—orders which, in spite of many telegrams to the capital, never came. And, as the hours went on, the police itself, excited by the Muslim war-cry, joined in the massacres.

Returning through the city at the cool of the day, Mabrûk chose quiet ways, having no taste for horrors. But he could not escape the sight of blood-stains on the ground; he encountered delicate young women, the guarded pearls of honoured households, wandering half naked, with mad eyes and corpse-like faces, bewailing their dishonour with a painful, harsh reiteration; and at a point in his road a crowd of men rushed past him, dragging among them the body of an

aged Frank to fling into the sea. Such abominations made the evening sunlight a distemper, the sparkle on the sea a devil's grin.

Arrived at the house, he found that Omar had spent most of the day in the service of his namesake, the Governor, who, with a few chance helpers, had done all in his power to abate the tumult. The Turk was fatigued from his exertions in the cause of order, but quite cheerful, recounting grisly horrors in the tone of small talk. He had taken care, he said, to let the Pasha know that he himself protected Christians in his house. How were the guests? Out of regard for Mabrûk's feelings he had not been near them. The servants reported them to be in the extremity of comfort and good health.

Mabrûk went to see for himself. He found Helweh and her brother kneeling on the floor in abject terror, praying to the picture of a woman which they had set up against the wall before them. To rebuke their idolatry Mabrûk kicked the thing with his foot, and made a hole in it, saying that God only is to be worshipped; whereupon they screamed aloud and cursed him, clearly deeming their last hour had come.

The servants, it appeared, had told them of the slaughter going forward, and pleased as true believers with their evident terror, had taken pleasure in fomenting it throughout the day. The rogues had assured them that a mob of armed devils was fast approaching, whereas, in fact, the house stood far removed from the scenes of bloodshed. By the time Mabrûk appeared the

pair were at their wits' end, and scarcely could recognize him.

"By the Prophet, you have no cause to fear," he said to them. "The riot is confined to the city and the foreign quarter. Its fury wanes already. Be ashamed to show such fear when His Highness Omar Efendi and I have sworn to hold you scatheless."

But they would not listen. They still kept calling on their broken god, and seemed convinced that danger threatened them.

CHAPTER XXXI

When Mabrûk informed Omar Efendi of the state of mind of the visitors, His Excellency was much annoyed.

"By the Most High, it shames me!" he cried out, "for they are guests of mine. Those servants who have practised on their fears shall be well punished. Does thy objection still survive, or may I be allowed to go and visit them? The girl, I would remind thee, is not one of ours. She has been used to bare her face to all beholders, so that in viewing it I shall not wrong thee more than many thousands of the sons of Adam have already done."

Mabrûk laughed at that, a little shamefacedly, and declared that he had lost all fondness for the girl. He smarted still from the ungrateful insults which the pair had heaped upon him when he smashed their idol.

Omar Efendi went and tried to comfort them, but could not win a way to their understanding.

"Leave them alone," he said, returning to Mabrûk. "The girl is pretty, O my dear, but a sad shrew. She cursed me for a Muslim and a murderer—me, her host! They are both quite

mad, and likely to remain so till we can get them out of this country. The young man and his box present great difficulties. He is sure to think us robbers if we try to move it."

However, on the morrow, when it was known that the slaughter was at an end, the guests were in more reasonable mood; though they still refused to stir out of their private rooms, where they sat close together on the floor, for ever chattering in a fearful strain. Upon inquiry it was found that they had wealthy friends in Beyrût, and money enough to pay the passage thither. Omar Efendi at once dispatched a servant to the harbour to engage a place for them on the first packet. The concern of Habîb for his strong box then became a frenzy. He confessed that it contained effects of priceless worth, his master's property. Omar suggested that they should dig a hole in the sand, and bury it; but the young man shook his head. It required, he said, two mighty men to carry it, and who would hide his treasure before witnesses?

"Thou and I together might make shift to carry it," said the Turk, with sly intent; whereupon that coward drew away from him, and mouthed his apprehension with parched lips.

Finally Omar himself arranged for the box to be deposited at the Greek consulate, its contents declared, and a receipt given. The consul had been sorely wounded in the riot; but the work of his office was resumed after a day; and his deputy tendered formal thanks to the Turk for protecting Christians, and preserving the property of a well-

known Greek subject. At a hint of fresh disturbances, it was arranged that the staff of the divers consulates, with all documents and valuables, should be taken on board for security. The consuls of England, Russia, and Italy were also kept in bed by grievous wounds.

When Habîb still raised objections against parting with his master's safe, Omar for one moment dropped the courteous host, and used a tone of fierce authority. That was enough. The poor wretch shrank as at the sight of cruel fangs, and thenceforth did as he was told, with palsied limbs. The box was carried before him by two porters to the consulate, and he showed the receipt on his return, staring with sad eyes at a strip of paper which had been given in exchange for so much wealth. The major-domo, a grave and discreet person, escorted the quaking pair on board their steamer, which was packed from stem to stern with frightened emigrants. Helweh caressed Mabrûk at parting, and praised the Lord for his kindness in exalted strains; but he knew her heart was glad to see the last of him. Of a truth, it was now quite plain to his intelligence that she had never, from the first, felt love for him, but only wooed him for a selfish purpose. Yet he could not much regret a deception which had allowed him to make good the wickedness he had committed months ago by Kafr Zeyn.

Though order was restored, the streets of the seaport failed to regain their wonted eager life. Most of the shops and places of business were closed, and troops were picketed in the streets of

the Frankish quarter. The rioters, on coming to themselves, had fled in fear of reprisals, and now lay hid among the villages, or slunk back to their homes by twos and threes. The terror of the foreigners was undiminished, for the town was given over to the military, and every soldier was a tool of the redoubted Arâbi. The news from the capital grew more and more alarming. At the very moment when the representatives of the Powers were denouncing Ahmed Pasha Arâbi for conniving at the recent massacres, the Sultan was graciously pleased to honour the peasant-soldier with the highest order of the Mejidîyeh; which the whole world naturally took to mean that the Lofty Gate would help the rebels if it came to war.

Omar Efendi gnashed his teeth when he heard of it. Dervîsh Pasha was no friend of his, he said, and yet he had always considered him a subtle man till now. Could anything be more ignominious than the part which the Sultan's plenipotentiary was at present playing in El Câhireh, shouted at by both parties, and listened to by neither—he the representative of the Successor of the Prophet, of the Chief Power in the world? And now to decorate the Fellâh at such a moment!

He could no longer endure the spectacle of such ineptitude, and decided to leave at once for Istanbûl. The departure was decided on so suddenly that Mabrûk could scarcely realize its imminence till the Turk was gone. Then, when, having watched the steamer leave the quay, he

turned his face towards the fort, henceforth his home, the world seemed senseless.

The Turk's going lessened him in more ways than one. Apart from the exchange of a stately domicile for narrow quarters in Fort Adda, he was made to feel a difference in the behaviour of superior officers. His protector was gone from the land, and there was no longer anything to be gained by petting him. So he was ordered about with other subalterns, and set to work.

Arâbi had at heart the reparation and effective arming of all the forts at Iskenderîyeh, the presence of the foreign warships off the town having reminded him that it was inadequately guarded; and the task was pushed forward earnestly, the whole garrison working by relays. It was carried on in the sight of the French and English fleets, towards which the toilers threw a laugh occasionally, and a glance not devoid of anxiety. Every morning for a week Mabrûk sat out beneath a temporary shelter overlooking a gang at work upon the huge brown wall that sloped to the dazzling water, agreeably conscious now and then of a spyglass directed on him from one of the ironclads. When off duty it was his recreation to stroll with a brother officer to the quay or the railway-station, and watch the rout of the enemy.

For the Nazarenes were now in full flight. Every train from the capital brought its crowd of Franks and Greeks and Syrians, whose one thought was to get at once on shipboard. It was a show for the simple Muslimîn of Iskenderîyeh,

who observed: "Allah is greatest! Who would have thought there were so many unbelievers in the world?" Ships outward bound were overcrowded. Ladies, the owners of charm, went on their knees in prayer to rough ship's captains, who, though doubtless loath, refused to take them. Hundreds were left on shore expecting to be killed each minute, and the pickets in the streets looked on indifferently.

One day, as Mabrûk was strolling up to the station intent upon this pastime, he observed a general movement in the same direction, and heard a whisper: "Efendîna comes." The approach to the station was choked with sightseers, all save a space around some carriages, which was kept clear by soldiers. The crowd was very quiet. Mabrûk heard distinctly the noise of the train pulling up, and a minute later saw the Khedive issue forth attended by some officers of his household, among whom was Saïd Bey Ramadân. The old rogue had at last obtained the reward of his dog-like adherence, and was now in the household of his ruined lord.

Muhammad Tewfik Pasha stepped with dignity. He took no notice of the multitude, but got at once into his carriage and was driven off, some horsemen galloping in front to clear a way. When he was gone, the crowd broke silence with a moan of sympathy:

"Efendîna! He is finished—Efendîna! A good, upright man, in spite of all! It is hard for him to bear, the poor one! May Allah, in His mercy, comfort him!"

The coming of the Khedive to his palace at Ramleh, though loudly denounced by Arâbi as desertion to his country's enemies, was of comfort to the soldiers still at work upon the forts. Hitherto they had felt a lurking fear lest the English and French men-of-war, whose gun-ports stared at them, might fire a cannon treacherously to their destruction. But Efendîna was a good, pious man, and loved poor people. The Franks were his allies, and would do all he told them. It was certain that he would prevent their hurting poor innocent and righteous soldier-men.

Then a shout went round the forts. Arâbi had come; he was in their midst, the peasant soldier, the great Egyptian. Between Efendîna and Arâbi, there could be no fear.

The English admiral, whose name was Sîmûr, wished to meddle with the work upon the forts. Again and again he asked that the repairs should cease. But his demands were addressed to the Khedive, who passed them on to Arâbi, who paid no heed; for was it Sîmûr's business?

Then Sîmûr sent to say he would bombard the forts unless the work was dropped immediately. Men gaped at that; but it was known to be an empty threat, for had not Galâdstûn sworn that the French and English ships should injure no man? The fleets were there to comfort Efendîna, and Efendîna was against bombardment. When at evening of that day the French fleet steamed away, leaving only English men-of-war before the town, the vanity of Sîmûr's threat was plainly

seen; for it was sure the English dared not act alone.

But ere long it became known that all the English subjects left in Iskenderîyeh had been ordered on board the ships; and late at night an order from Arâbi went round the forts bidding the soldiers prepare for the worst.

CHAPTER XXXII

At earliest dawn the bugles sounded in Fort Adda, and were echoed from the other forts across the water; and in ten minutes every man was under arms. The morning prayers and prostrations were performed in ranks, the officers ranged in front, close behind the imâm. Then the gunners ran to their posts; the infantry, of which there was a whole battalion in the enclosure paraded in the yard awaiting orders. Some fifty of these were detached on various services; the rest were told to keep their ranks, and wait in a place of shelter near the powder-magazine, well away from the embrasures. Mabrûk, with ten men, was told off to assist the surgeon. The dawn was fair, and as he hurried to and fro he felt hopeful, in spite of the ghastly nature of the preparations.

But when the sun came up, and the shadows of the works and men acquired precision, it shone on many columns of dark smoke, which, rising straight in the still air, were clearly seen above the rampart. Writhing, and with the play of sunshine on them, they seemed malignant ginnis, such as stalk across the deserts of the South.

They proceeded from the chimneys of the floating castles, and when they bowed suddenly and streamed out to seaward, it was known that their progenitors were under way. The strain upon the soldiers' nerves became unbearable. Among those kept inactive by the powder-magazine, some laughed and wept by turns, hysterically, yet with a pretence at joke. Then came a detonation which upset the world. The men sent up a cry of glad relief. Suspense was over. Another and another followed. Splinters of stone and earth fell round Mabrûk as he ran with his men to pick up the first wounded. He judged his last hour had come, yet felt no fear; for the place was walled round strongly, there was no escape: he, with all there, was entirely in the hand of Allah.

The guns of the fort were talking loudly by this time, and the warships answered their defiance with an ugly roar. The argument of the other forts filled every interval between the shocks. Mabrûk was deafened, jarred from head to foot, yet went about his business deftly, to his own amazement. The stronghold seemed to rock on its foundations, the smoke to whirl around it, shrieking, like dense flocks of startled sea-birds. Shells hurtled overhead, and burst upon the walls, with a report which mercifully drowned the death-shrieks. Mabrûk lost count of time. It was as if he were already dead, and watched another man perform his duties. The faces all around were strange to him, grimed beyond knowledge, and obscured by lurid gloom. For

the world was darkened with the rolling smoke, and the frequent flashes were like lightning in a storm. The thunder was incessant. His task was now no trifle. The wounded called from all sides, and the dead lay in the way. He sent for ten more men, and even then could scarcely cope with all there was to do.

Three of the guns were silenced. As Mabrûk removed the body of a gunner, charred and mutilated, he saw for a moment, through the embrasure, the walls of three huge ships, with smoke obscuring them. The sea was dark, and seemed to shudder. There came a flash which blinded him. The fort was shaken. The surgeon's voice behind him cried: "Come back, O madman!" He had drawn back quickly, hauling the dead gunner, when the surgeon, mad with his excitement, spat at him and struck his face, with curses on his useless self-exposure. But at that moment the fort seemed split in two; a fount of flame sprang up from out the midst of it; then came the sound as of a mountain falling, and then what seemed dead silence, though the guns still thundered.

"O Lord! O High Protector! O Most Merciful!" cried the doctor, clutching at Mabrûk. "It is the powder-magazine. Three hundred innocent men! Our Lord have mercy on them. Woe! Woe!"

Dust filled the air, which, added to the smoke, made perfect darkness. Protecting their eyes, the two men stumbled towards the scene of disaster. They came upon a man in tears. It was the commandant.

"O Allah, take my life!" he cried aloud. "O Lord, forgive me for awaiting orders. All these poor ones had no business here; they were quite useless. Their blood is on my hands! O Mabrûk, and thou, O good hakîm, save yourselves! Go to Muhammad Tewfik, the betrayer, and tell him what vile deeds his friend has done. May Allah destroy the house of that foul murderer, the wicked Sîmûr. O Muslimîn, we are oppressed, undone!"

Some guns of the fort still replied to the fire of the warships, as Mabrûk and the surgeon with many others, all powder-grimed, some wounded, escaped and took the road which leads to Ramleh. Soon they became involved in a considerable crowd of angry soldiers, all making, like themselves, for the Khedive's residence. Though the hour was, perhaps, the second after noon, the sun was nowhere seen. The sky was dark with lowering clouds, and the darkness was reflected in the sea, the war-smoke eddying round the ships and forts seeming white by comparison. Smoke went up from the town in two places, showing that damage had been done in that direction. A haze of dust enveloped the trudging crowd, whose wrath had evaporated long before they saw the long façade of the palace, leaving anguish in its place.

"Efendîna!" was their cry. "See how they are killing us. Efendîna, stay the hand of the wicked infidels! Speak to Sîmûr that he cease from murder! Oh, it is cruel! It is a sin for thee to deliver us into his hand! Forsake us not, O lord of kindness, or we shall know thee wicked, and shall hate thee."

At the tumult certain officials of the Prince's household looked out at a doorway, among them Saïd Bey Ramadân, with a face of great dismay. Spying some men of rank amid the crowd, they summoned them to enter and make known their will. Awaiting the return of their spokesmen, the tired soldiers lay or sat upon the ground. Some even fell asleep instantaneously, with faces hidden in their arms. The great ones soon returned. They said that the Khedive had been greatly moved by their condition, and had sworn to go himself and speak to Sîmûr. Tulbah Pasha had been sent already, but to no purpose. Now His Highness would go in person and entreat for mercy. At that there was a murmur of thanksgiving, and most of the demonstrators turned again towards the town. But a minority, of which were Mabrûk and the doctor, chose to lie where they were and rest, being dead tired.

Mabrûk and his companion slept till nearly sunset. They awoke refreshed, and listened in vain for the sound of firing. A servant of the palace kindly gave them food and drink, and they returned with new courage to Fort Adda. They reached the place after dark to find it in ruins, groans and weak cries proceeding from among the wreckage. One part only had escaped much damage, and there a light was burning and a few of the survivors sat in council.

Mabrûk and the doctor toiled through all the night, extricating the wounded and taking measures for their removal. It was known that Arâbi would evacuate the town next day, and

that no poor soldier with the hope of life in him must be left behind to bear the insults of the infidels. When the firing ceased, the clouds had gradually dispersed; and now the stars shone with peculiar splendour, so bright as to strike light from out the sea. Fort Pharos was a shapeless heap; the minaret of the soldiers' mosque had gone. Away in the town two separate fires were raging; but the flames and smoke of them seemed insignificant, almost ludicrous, after the horrors of the day. As he worked among the ruins, Mabrûk caught snatches of joyous song and shouts from the English warships, showing how the heathen exulted in their fell work.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Retreat began in secret before the dawn's first light, but Mabrûk and the doctor were delayed till after noon by the difficulty they experienced in procuring carriages for the conveyance of the wounded. When at length they left the town, the sun was fierce, and its rays were blinding upon lake and sea. The whole long road to Kafr ed-Dowâr was covered thick with troops and flying townsfolk, receding in a haze of yellow dust. The ambulance had often to draw aside to let a baggage-train go lumbering by, or, it might be, a light field-battery, the drivers plying their whips, the gunners sucking apricots and flinging the stones with laughter at the crowd.

Among the fugitives were many miscreants, who would fain have stormed the carriages and flung the sick folk out beside the road that they themselves might travel more at ease; but a remnant of his helpers of the day before still clung to Mabrûk, and that small guard of disciplined men sufficed to damp the courage of marauders. Destruction seemed the order of the day, for gangs were seen demolishing the railway, which for some distance ran beside the road, and

breaking down the telegraph posts and wires; and soon, among the hurrying crowd, a cry arose: "O Lord Most High! The city is on fire!"

In fact, such clouds rose up into the sky as to suggest a conflagration of the whole city. People who had left their houses wailed aloud and tore their clothing, with curses on the incendiaries. But someone better informed cried out: "It is the Frankish quarter only. It is but justice for their evil deeds," when tears were changed for shouts of praise to Allah.

From near Kafr ed-Dowâr, where already some semblance of an organized camp appeared, Mabrûk observed the progress of the fire. While still some distance from the lines, he was relieved by a party of trained servants of the medical staff, and, thus set at liberty, went and sat with his men beneath a dyke beside the lake. Afar, across the bright expanse of water, with the white wings of many sea-birds flashing over it, the seaport gloomed beneath a smoky canopy, of surface white and wavy like a summer cloud. From out the nether darkness flames shot up, now here, now there, throwing up lines of building with surprising clearness. And still, from all the long embankment road, rose the dust of the retreat.

Mabrûk and his satellites, their limbs at rest, were lost in moral reflections which the sight engendered, when a cross voice bellowed:

"Up, O lazy ones! May Allah cut short your lives! Is there not work to do?" A bimbashi of the Engineers stood on the bank above them. Seeing an officer, the speaker lowered his tone,

and besought Mabrûk to haste with his men and help in the work of entrenchment. The idlers, shamefaced, sped in the direction indicated.

That evening men from the English warships landed in Iskenderîyeh, and set to work to restore order and put out the fires. By their exertions that town was held for the Khedive; Arâbi reigned in all the rest of Egypt.

Ahmed Arâbi now stood forth against the world, reposing only on the might of Egypt. The Khedive demanded to know by what authority he had withdrawn the army from Iskenderîyeh, and destroyed the means of communication between that city and the rest of Egypt. He proclaimed the destitution of Arâbi, and denounced him as a rebel.

In return, Arâbi and his council denounced His Highness as a traitor, for siding with the murderers of his people. And therewith, to show his power, the noble Ahmed commanded the mudîrs of all the provinces to call upon the omdehs at once to furnish an additional force of thirty thousand men, including all the village watchmen as inured to discipline, and further to levy a tax for the expenses of the war. The army applauded measures which spread despair among the villages, saying here was a lord indeed, none like him under heaven. Even the ban of the Successor of the Prophet, solemnly laid on the usurper, failed to damp their enthusiasm; for it was clear that the Sultan had been forced by the Powers of Europe thus to condemn the man he had so lately honoured. The soldiers, therefore,

laboured with a will to complete the mighty works their lord commanded, throwing up a chain of strong redoubts from Kafr ed-Dowâr to a point on the sea-coast, protecting the camp itself with a monstrous dyke and trench, and planting posts for telegraph lines, while conscripts poured in from the whole of Egypt.

Mabrûk himself saw no more than the project of these works; for at sunrise of the fourth day after the retreat from Iskenderîyeh he rode forth from the camp at the head of a little troop, well mounted upon horses lifted from the stables of the town. Word of his coolness during the bombardment having reached the ear of power, he found himself raised to the rank of yuzbashi and honoured with a small command. His task was to spy out the country eastward as far as the river, to ascertain the resources of each village, and assess its contribution to the food-supply of the army. The men were a mere handful, rendered docile by inexperience. Yet, alone with them, he thought it wise to seem indulgent, and regretted his severity at starting, when he had thought of nothing but to please beholders.

It was a joy to feel free once more, to ride at ease among the palm-groves in the cool of morning; to exchange views with the fellahîn, and chaff the girls with burdens on their heads—brown amber beauties, who passed them with hips swaying and insurgent breasts. Glimpses of the lake of Abu Kîr, of white sails on the canal, were caught between the palm-trunks. The troopers sang and laughed without a cause.

Before the heat of the sun grew troublesome, they turned aside into a village of the grove, where Mabrûk took his ease in the guest-room, the omdeh and all the elders in tears before him. They had nothing, they protested—no stores of any kind; how, then, should they provide food for a whole army? Moreover, now that the watchmen were to be withdrawn, their stores would be exposed to robbery, and might be gone from day to day.

"O lying sons of dogs!" Mabrûk cried fiercely. "Are you Masriyîn to talk in this way, when called upon to serve your country?"

At that there was loud weeping, and one old man moaned:

"Efendim, we are Muslimîn, and leave our cause to God. But since when is it a crime for men to dwell in this region of Masr, that we should be punished, for that alone, by the loss of our sons and all our substance? How shall we get in our crops, with so few hands? O Allah, look on us, for we are ruined!"

At that Mabrûk, in a rage, commanded them to be scourged; but the mere appearance of the kurbâg in a soldier's hand was enough. Those old men flung themselves upon the ground before Mabrûk, battling one against another for the privilege of licking his boots. "Take all that we possess," they cried. "Would to Allah it were more, since thou, our beloved lord, hast need of it."

Bidding the executioner stay his hand a moment, Mabrûk began again to question them.

But finding they still must lie and contradict each other, he gave the signal for the flogging to proceed. The thong, flourished hissing, fell upon the back of one and another; and their shrieks went forth. The inquiry was at this stage, when one of his men appeared in the doorway, asking leave to speak with him. This man, his name Abbâs, brought all the information which Mabrûk required concerning cattle and corn, having gathered it in conversation with some women. Mabrûk then adjudged the amount of provisions to be supplied every week to the camp; and gave the omdeh a certificate, intended to protect the village from future exactions, which was received reluctantly, with bitter tears and prayers to Allah.

Four villages were thus disposed of before sunset, and at a fifth the detachment prepared to pass the night. Here Abbâs the intelligent made himself Mabrûk's servant, waiting on him with a deftness which disarmed objection.

"Efendim, may I say something?" he asked when his chief had shown some liking for him. "It is that to-day we have not done our business properly? I was a year in the service of a mudîr, so know the way of it. I say it with respect: it is quite wrong to use the whip at the first. Your Grace should hem and groan and feign concern for them, letting the truth out by degrees, with due suggestion of Your Honour's power to save or ruin. Vouchsafe them time to make their offerings; scourge only those who grumble or give nought, and then, having taken all they

choose to give, make the assessment as seems fair to thee. If it be light, they think their presents won thee ; if heavy, then their presents were too small. And why need Your Highness toil through the heat of the day ? Choose the place and hour which pleases thee, and bid all omdehs of the neighbourhood attend thee there. While they wait thy pleasure, I will mix with them, and see that each man has his present ready. So thou art enriched, and the work is performed just the same. I ask pardon, Efendim."

The counsel pleased Mabrûk; he followed it from that day forth, and found the work go much more smoothly, the villagers feeling less cruelly oppressed when allowed to make a bid for their salvation. Thus, with pleasure and some little profit, he spent three weeks among the peasantry, winning the esteem of all men by his great urbanity. At the end of that time he entered the town of Damanhûr, whose mosques and houses cover a high kôm, eminent as a mountain in that prostrate land. Here he had orders to assist the mudîr in a difficulty which had arisen with certain omdehs, who could not, or would not, furnish men for the army.

The mudîr, a kind old man, sympathized at heart with the offenders.

" By Allah, by our lord Ibrahîm ed-Dessûki, it is a shame !" he told Mabrûk in private. " All the rabble of the towns would volunteer in hopes of plunder, so why press the villages which have been drained already ? It is only because these people are patient and inarticulate. Never, even

in the days of Muhammad Ali, has there been a levy so exhausting to this country, nor one conducted with so high a hand. Look round upon the condition of the provinces: no law, save where the soldiers are, and there no justice. Seeing there is no help in Masr, the Sûdân is yielding to the lying Mahdi. Allah knows what will remain of us when this madness is overpast."

He ran some risk by speaking thus, even in private, to one he knew not well, for Arâbi had established in the capital a Committee, whose spies were everywhere, and men of note were liable to be proscribed on the bare word of any rascal talebearer.

Mabrûk, unmoved by the lamentations of the old official, set to work to outwit and subdue the recalcitrant omdehs. Abbâs again instructed him how to proceed. It was no good, he asserted, to go straight into a village and ask the headman for so many men. The proper way was first to capture as many men as possible in the fields or among the houses, and then display them at the omdeh's house, letting their agonized relations buy them down to the number required. Abbâs was a good honest man who knew his business thoroughly; and Mabrûk did not grudge him a percentage on the profits which accrued from his advice.

In this manner, from the country round Damanhûr, Mabrûk and the servants of the mudirîyeh drove not less than five hundred able men, who were kept herded in the town for a while, and diligently harangued by holy sheykhs

and wild dervishes. By dint of exhortation, and the excitement of frequent zikrs, the sheep-like crowds of terrified peasants were soon maddened and filled with furious zeal against the infidels, as the source of all their ills; and, thus fired, they were deemed fit for distribution among the various garrisons and camps.

The mudîr had spoken truth concerning the sad condition of the peasantry. The ways were infested with brigands; all the money in the land was buried, and had to be dug up as required, which caused vexatious delays in Mabrûk's new business; the villagers, bereft of trained watchmen, were apt to be terrorized by a few bad characters. But the young man kept his faith in the virtues of a patriotism which had raised him personally above such misery. When, going to mosque with his men at noon one Friday, he heard prayer publicly offered for the speedy termination of the war, it irked him to seem to acquiesce in so mean-spirited a petition.

The town of Damanhûr was not without its group of ardent patriots—young men who wore with ease the Frankish dress and mingled French words with the virile Arabic, by means of whom Mabrûk saw news-sheets of the capital, and heard the latest rumours. A considerable force of English had landed at Iskenderîyeh, and their greatest general, the Sîr Wûlsli, was expected to take the command. Thus much might be believed; but Mabrûk put not much faith in newspapers. He remembered how, just after the great bombardment, Arâbi had caused to be printed in his

official war news the statement that four English ironclads had been sunk by the fire of the Egyptian batteries. The surviving gunners had praised his name for that. Mabrûk himself had seen one of them, with the blessed journal in his hand, thanking Allah that his shame was turned to glory. But the incident showed that His Grandeur nursed the public curiosity, vouchsafing only such intelligence as he judged was good for it. So when Mabrûk was assured by fervid patriots in Damanhûr that the Sîr Wûlsli had no sooner landed in Iskenderîyeh than he fled at sight of the Egyptian hosts, and sailed straight back to Europe, his mind attached no credence to the report.

A little later, and it was known that the Sîr had in truth set sail, but not for terror. His force had landed to the eastward, and now occupied the whole course of the Ship Canal. Arâbi, people said, was furious at the vile trick, and the Mûssiû Lassabs, lawful father of that canal, Arâbi's friend, was quite beside himself.

"They think us uncivilized people; they pretend we cannot guard their cursed ditch," cried the patriots of Damanhûr. "By the Prophet, it is the greatest insult. It proclaims them savages. In sh' Allah, Arâbi will give them henceforth neither quarter nor politeness."

On the same day on which he heard of Wûlsli's treachery Mabrûk was joined by 'Ala'd-dîn, who had come by train from the capital. The sweet-meat-seller brought glad news for him.

Zeynab welcomed his advances, and could

marry when he pleased; for Amîn Bey had had the kindness to pronounce the formula of divorce at parting from her. Mabrûk's child had been the solace of her widowhood, the legal term of which had now expired.

Mabrûk was strangely moved by this announcement. He at once craved audience of the mudîr, and told his story. The old man listened with a pleasant smile, and took it upon himself to grant the bridegroom leave of absence for four days, which was all he asked. Abbâs, the intelligent and trusty, was left in charge of the little troop.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The changed aspect of the capital dismayed Mabrûk. The foreign quarter was deserted, houses shuttered, shops closed; only a few low Greeks and Italians, too poor to think of flight, were to be seen slinking about the meaner streets; and these all wore the tarbûsh, not the hat. In the Mûski, wont to be densely crowded at that hour, there was so little traffic that he could see a funeral half a mile away, the high-prowed coffin, with its coloured pall, tossing on men's shoulders towards the desert hill, which closed the long straight vista like a wall. The very water-sellers gave their cry dejectedly, as men heart-weary of this wicked world; and when Mabrûk turned off into the shadowed markets, the merchants in the shops, like caves, on either hand, scowled at him malevolently.

"Allah knows, it is not to be wondered at," said 'Ala'd-dîn in their excuse. "It is the worst of times for all merchants and craftsmen. There is nothing doing, and they blame you soldiers. Moreover, the tyranny of the Committee has been pushed so far, so many good men suffer for an idle tale, that these are pushed to desperation,

and care not what may happen. Forgive them, O my dear! Patriotism is not their business: praise be to Allah, it is thine, and profits thee."

He spent that night at the house of 'Ala'd-dîn, who made a feast in his honour. From him he heard the gossip of his native village. Rashîd had joined the army, in place of a certain youth, the only son of a poor blind man, whom the Sheykh Mustafa had selected as being a partisan of old Mahrûs. The omdeh had been furious; till, hearing how both friend and foe acclaimed Rashîd, he too perceived the beauty of such conduct, and now took credit for his son's self-sacrifice. As Arâbi's nominee, the Sheykh Mustafa enjoyed high honour above all the omdehs, so that his faction in the village had been saved from all oppression. As for the other faction, he had practically annihilated it by the simple expedient of denouncing Mahrûs and all his sons to the Committee as disaffected persons. They were in prison, and as good as dead. Indeed, he was now so high and prosperous that men whispered he had found the treasure of Muhammad en-Nûri; but the same had been said of Mahrûs in the day of his pride, and 'Ala'd-dîn, for one, did not believe it. The sweet-meat-seller talked of him through half the night, portraying his greatness for his son's contentment.

In the morning Mabrûk went betimes to the bath, where he passed two pleasant hours, and thence repaired to his former residence, whither

'Ala'd-dîn had preceded him. The same old Nubian was at the door of the house, and made him reverence, calling the day most lucky. In his old room he found good company of friends and neighbours, whom the sweetmeat-seller had collected to attest the contract. 'Ala'd-dîn, as the bride's representative, sat cross-legged, facing Mabrûk, within the ring of witnesses. Clasping their right hands, each with thumb upraised, they exchanged the necessary words, when all present recited the Fâtiha, and the ceremony was at an end. A light refection followed, prepared by Zeynab and the wife of 'Ala'd-dîn, who were at present entertaining a large party of ladies in the apartment of the late Circassian ; and a pair of hired performers made sweet music.

Chilled by the desolation of the once gay city, Mabrûk arranged for Zeynab to go back to the life of the village, which was more as usual. He spent two days of pure delight in the society of his wife and child, and then returned, though loath, to Damanhûr.

Alighting with a sad face at his destination, he was met by Abbâs, his lieutenant, with a face of glee. There was no time to be lost if His Honour would behold the flogging of a mighty malefactor, whom the troop had captured cleverly the day before ; so Mabrûk made haste with Abbâs to the courtyard of the mudirîyeh, where, in the full sunlight of the afternoon, a burly man, stripped naked, lay bound face downward on a block of wood. Two soldiers, armed with knotted thongs in which were nails, prepared for labour, while

the rest looked on. The Câdi and the sub-mudîr were likewise present.

The cries of the helpless wretch, his trickling blood, distressed Mabrûk. He thought the man ill-used, and said as much. But the judge assured him that this howling sufferer was a miscreant undeserving of compassion. This man was no other than a wicked brigand, who had robbed poor righteous wayfarers upon the dyke, and left one youth for dead. At that Mabrûk felt no more pity for the beast, but rejoiced with the rest in the spectacle of his anguish. Amid so much persecution for political causes, purely obsequious in its nature, it was a relief to look on at a punishment of which the conscience could approve in sober moments.

After their capture of the brigand, just for fantasy, there was nothing left for the soldiers to do in Damanhûr. Mabrûk idled all day long in company with the patriots of the place, and heard their tidings of the war. The seizure of the Suez Canal by the main body of the enemy obliged Arâbi to turn round and make his front towards the sands of the Isthmus; the camp at Kafr ed-Dowâr, on the fortification of which his energies had till then been concentrated, becoming of secondary importance. A general movement of troops was the consequence, and Mabrûk wondered greatly why no orders came for him. He heard of desperate fighting at Kafr ed-Dowâr, then of a victory on the banks of the Canal. Picturing Rashîd in the thick of the fighting, in the helpless station of a common soldier,

he longed to reach his brother and protect him. Telegrams from the seat of war and from the Ministry were arriving every hour at the mudirîyeh, but there was no mention made of him in any one of them. At length, upon the news of a most glorious victory at Casâsîn, he could endure it no longer, but resolved to put an end to this inaction. He made formal application for his route to the mudîr, who straightway telegraphed to the War Department. The answer came without delay:

"Instruct the bimbashi to transport the men and horses under his command by rail to Zacâzîc, thence march to Tel-el-Kebîr and join the army there."

"It is plain that they had quite forgotten thee," said the mudîr, with a chuckle, as he showed Mabrûk the slip of paper. But the young man quite forgave their past neglect, since in atonement they had raised him to the rank of bimbashi. He went at once to the station, and, with high looks, bade its lord prepare a train for him. That was after sunset. By the first hour next morning the train was ready. Proper boxes were provided for the horses, but the soldiers and Mabrûk had to travel all together in an open truck. A deputation of the patriots of Damanhûr rose early and came to the station, to wish their brave defenders God-speed. They extolled the valour of the Egyptians, and ridiculed the braggart Sîr Wûlsli and his host of cowards. This Wûlsli had but fourteen thousand homesick English fellahîn at his command—men who fainted

in the heat of every day; how dared he hope to overcome Arâbi's hardy host of thirty thousand? He had come contemptuously, as against savages, to meet a foe his superior in civilization and discipline. Now, of course, he was afraid, and kept his lines. He dared not venture forth into the open, knowing how, by the blessing of Allah, his host would perish utterly as water spilt upon the burning sands.

"Be not afraid!" these jokers told Mabrûk. "The Sîr Wûlsli is almost finished. Kill but a few of the Inklîz, the rest will die of fright. In sh' Allah, thou wilt return to us in safety, bringing Wûlsli's mustachios."

They shouted blessings as the train moved off, the soldiers answered with glad cries, and the driver of the engine, caught by the enthusiasm, kept the whistle going constantly for some ten minutes. This last game pleased the troopers hugely; and after that, whenever they passed near a village, there were cries of "O Muhammad, make him speak again!" and Muhammad obeyed with a will. Some of the men played games with grains of corn upon the floor of the truck, while others bit chick-peas or green pistachio nuts. But after a while, the sun growing fiercer and fiercer, the most part went to sleep. Mabrûk himself had long been napping when, opening his eyes, he gazed on scenes he knew. Here were fields, green or brown, whereof he knew the owners, a certain clump of trees, shading a sakieh, seeming jealous of its shadow in the white-hot noon; here were men he knew at work

beside the line, and here was his native village plumed with palms. Then the train, going slowly, rumbled on the bridge; he saw the long, broad reaches of the Nile, as familiar to him as his own mother's face, and surveyed the whole extent of the Mountain where one night he had lain in wait as a robber. And then the men cried: "O Muhammad, make him speak!" and, with loud whistling, they entered the station of Benha. Here all was wild confusion. A troop-train from the capital had just arrived, and, for some reason or other, the lord of the station wished to empty out its inhabitants and put them in a set of trucks there waiting. A violent altercation ensued, in which a crowd of mere spectators bore their part. Officers were pursuing the station officials, chastising them mercilessly.

"Allah is greatest!" Mabrûk heard one poor ill-used man cry out in anguish. "How should I know where your Excellency's charger will be put? Is it my business? Behold, all is in confusion; all is for nothing, and our wages nowhere. O Sheykh of the Arabs, great father of consolation! It is ruin for the railways; a century will never pay for all the damage."

Soldiers stood in lines, their rifles grounded, grinning broadly at all they heard and saw.

"Has the great battle happened?" was the question of Mabrûk's detachment.

"Not yet, the praise to Allah! Wûlsli fears."

"The praise to Allah, we may yet be there!"

Their small private train was presently shunted away from the noise and the cursing out upon a

siding, where it stood forgotten for at least two hours. Sellers of water, nuts, bread, hard-boiled eggs, and water-melons came out across the rails and cried their merchandise. The soldiers haggled with these merchants and devoured their wares and afterwards were glad to sleep a while. But at length, grown weary of the stand-still, they called the engine-driver, who lay snoring, and woke him, saying: "Make him talk out loud."

A series of piercing whistles rent the sunlit air, and ceased not till men came in haste to learn the matter. These Mabrûk addressed in so superb a tone that they at once declared the line quite clear to Zacâzîc. The engine then went round from head to tail, and they were pulled out in the direction whence they came.

It wanted but two hours of sunset when they at last arrived at Zacâzîc, where the scene was only less confused than that at Benha. But Mabrûk's little company, being stalwart and of one mind, soon got themselves and their horses clear of the turmoil. Giving praise to Allah for their preservation, they mounted and rode off in good order. Leaving the mud-built town behind, they followed a long, straight bank over fields, between villages which gave forth a murmur as the sun sank, and approached a grove of palms, their shadows far before them. Presently they were met by a little group of fellahîn—two men and one woman, with a donkey led among them. The three were weeping all together, and bemoaning their sad fate. When Mabrûk inquired the cause of this their grief, they gaped on him a

space, and stared as at a portent, shielding their eyes from the sun's level rays; then wept anew.

"The robber!" they exclaimed. "Merciful Allah! Woe, the wicked robber! We were bringing two sacks home from the mill when he took us by the throat and beat us sorely. And our sacks! Alas, where are they? Alas, the ruin of our sacks of flour! Allah is greatest!"

"May Allah compensate you!" replied the soldiers. "By the Prophet, once the war is ended, we will quickly put a stop to such ill-doings."

They pursued their way, exclaiming upon the wickedness of some men, when, just within the grove, in tinted twilight, Mabrûk espied a tall, black-bearded sheykh reclining with two bulging sacks for pillows.

"Praise be to Allah!" he cried suddenly. "Is it thou, O Muhammad, O Nûri? Oh, the rapture to behold thee once again! It is I, Mabrûk, thy friend."

At his name the sheykh sprang up and ran towards him. Mabrûk dismounted. Locked in each other's arms, they wept a little, recalling days gone by. Then they sat down by the way-side, hand in hand, while the troopers took their ease and smoked and chatted.

"Come with us, O Muhammad," urged Mabrûk. "There is work for a man like thee renowned for bravery."

The robber shook his head.

"Not so, my son. I have seen that work and

like it not. When I escaped from my warders on the river-bank, beyond Assiût (thou knowest I was exiled to the utmost Sûdân), I found the army above Efendîna, and so joined the army. Wallahi, it was well enough in barracks there in the south, and I bore myself well—none better. But when they brought us north to that accursed camp at Kafr ed-Dowâr, and bullets came out of the air and slew men near me, then Muhammad knew that it was not his business. Knowest thou, O my dear, that there be three kinds of bullets, which are named, from the voice of them, 'whirr!' 'whizz!' and 'whinn!' Whirr! is tired and wellnigh harmless; whizz! has still some mind for mischief; but whinn!—oh, I assure thee, by Allah, whinn! is a perfect devil. Whinn! killed a man beside me—a kind man who had made some coffee for me, and stood offering it, as near as that! It sucked the marrow from my bones. My business is to make afraid, not to feel fear. So I walked out from the camp, and changed my clothes at the house of a poor fellâh, who hated the uniform and was glad to burn it. I made inquiry for my wife and family, and, having found them, came to dwell in the village yonder. Times are bad, however. All who possess money have long since buried it."

"But thou thyself hast treasure buried, surely?"

"Once, years ago, I had; but it was soon gone. About that time I killed a man of station for a commission, and had to spend my wealth to save my life. Since then I have never earned more than a sufficiency. . . . Nay, honour my poor

house this night," he cried, as Mabrûk rose to depart.

"That is not possible," replied the other. "We are ordered to make all haste to the Great Mound, and the night is on us."

"Well, Allah preserve you all!" said Muhammad heartily.

The soldiers returned his blessing, and resumed their ride.

Great tranquil stars shone out; the fields on either hand exhaled sweet breaths. The tongue of cultivated land, the end of the rîf, went narrowing until it formed a valley between desert banks, which seemed white in the uncertain starlight compared with the darker hues of vegetation. Camp fires began to be seen here and there, and forms of men appeared in silhouette as their owners passed and repassed the flames. More than once ill faces peered at them, and, seeing their numbers, wished them a happy night. They were passing through the zone of camp-followers, rogues, male and female, the scum of every nation under heaven, who flocked like vultures to the scene of carnage. They traversed a village, full of life, though the hour was late. The telegraph office—a temporary building—showed a light in every window. Orderlies hurried to and fro, and all gradations of rascality and vice seemed represented in the jesting crowd that choked the alleys. Sounds of revelry, the voice of a woman singing, the notes of an aûd, the rhythmic beat of a darabûkka, were in the air. Somewhere in the distance a military band was playing the Khedivial

hymn in careless mockery. Mabrûk was glad to leave behind a place so near to hell.

Up on a long, low ridge against the stars dark lines of tents were seen, and among them many points of light, some moving, some at rest. A murmur floated thence, as from a city ere it sinks to rest. It was the camp on Tel-el-Kebîr. A minute more and they were challenged by the outposts.

CHAPTER XXXV

Within the lines at Tel-el-Kebîr there was not that joyous confidence which had prevailed among the patriots of Damanhûr. One half of the vast army there assembled had come in contact with the enemy, and the other half had heard their true report. At Casâsîn the day had gone against them, with a loss of quite a thousand killed and captured. In nearly every brush they had been worsted. But in no case had the English tried pursuit, which indicated that Sîr Wûlsli deemed his force insufficient for offensive warfare. Now, for two days there had been nothing doing. The inaction fretted the Egyptian soldiers, who would fain have returned again and again to the attack, in hope to finish Wûlsli before he could obtain supports. But the chiefs thought otherwise; and they were kept within their entrenchments, passing the time as best they could with song and tale and dull games played with pebbles. Their one hope was that the Sîr, emboldened by their stillness, might be inspired by Eblîs, his father, to assail them here. Then his end was written, for the post was nigh impregnable; their cannon would destroy him from afar. Against this hoped-

for contingency, the great guns were kept sighted to the distance, nicely calculated, at which a foe first came within deadly range.

Mabrûk learnt all this on the night of his arrival, when men still hoped for work upon the morrow. But the morrow dawned, the far-off hills of Asia shaped themselves out of the night; they changed from black to grey, from grey to dreamy blue; the desert sands blushed suddenly, ribbed here and there with depths of velvet shadow; a few palm-trees in the Valley of Seven Wells stood forth commandingly; the coolness passed to blazing noon, the noon to evening; and still without an order to advance, or yet the faintest sign of any enemy. The same upon the next day and the next. Mabrûk, whose tent adjoined the camp-ground of some desert Arabs, heard their young sheykh grumbling at Arâbi, who had refused his offer to dare this skulking Sîr to single combat in the presence of both armies.

Mabrûk's lot here in camp was far from happy. Upon arrival he had found no man he knew; those officers whom he did encounter had no orders for him; till, seeing how he was lost, a caïmmacâm of the cavalry bade him dismount his men, and claimed the horses, which were fine ones and in excellent condition, for his own. At that the robbed one had protested bitterly, crying out that he was being spoiled, ill-treated. His wailing brought a great man on the scene, who told him angrily to stop that noise, and join a certain regiment which he named—an infantry regiment, so that he need not regret his horses.

So, with his men all muttering and cursing, he inquired his way through the camp to the command in question. There, at last, he was made welcome. The officer in charge confessed his need of men, having lost two hundred in a fight near Ismailîyeh. He invited Mabrûk to sup with him, and, struck with his refinement, arranged for him to share the tent of one Murad Bey, a negro, who was reckoned the exquisite of the regiment. This Murad had been the slave of a rich notable of El Mansûreh, who, having no heir of his body but one daughter, married her to this slave, a child of his own house, rather than have his wealth go out of the family. The black man, thus emancipated, became, at his master's death, the greatest personage in two provinces. He now served with the troops for honour merely; and his tent was a comfortable place, for he had slaves to wait on him.

But still Mabrûk could not feel happy. The turmoil of the mighty camp oppressed his soul. He had inquired near and far for Rashîd, but could get no news of him. His superiors, in moments of anger and excitement, spoke to him like a dog. There was not a word of his promotion to the rank of bimbashi, and he had lost the telegram which announced it. Often in these few days did he wish that he had left well alone, and never recalled his existence to the War Department. His men likewise grumbled, with the exception of Abbâs the intelligent, who, being an expert barber, was in great demand.

Murad Bey, though kind, was not intelligent.

His talk was of girls, of whom he kept good store, or jewellery, of which he was a judge, or land, of which he owned great tracts. He had a good voice, and could accompany himself upon the lute. Mabrûk enjoyed his singing, and sometimes asked for it to escape his conversation; and the good-natured black was always flattered by the request, and came to hold Mabrûk in close affection.

One evening when the latter was depressed, having been reprimanded for some negligence by his commanding officer, Murad sang him back to happiness, watching his face the while; and when he smiled at last, embraced him tenderly.

"The praise to Allah, thou art comforted. It grieved my soul to see thy face so sad!"

"I wish to Allah that the end would come!" exclaimed Mabrûk, recurring to his grievance. "I long every hour for the attack. Far better to die than to be thus dishonoured—I, who myself have commanded, with no man above me!"

At mention of the attack, the black's face straightened.

"No fear of that, in sh' Allah!" he observed very seriously. "We are quite safe here; the whole world says so! The place is quite impregnable unless by surprise; and how should they surprise us? See here!" He stooped and drew a plan upon the ground. "This is their position, that is ours. There is but one way they can take to come at us—this one, up the Valley of Seven Wells; and, praise to Allah, it is strongly guarded. All else is pathless desert which they

could not traverse save by day, when we should see them coming. By Allah! it is wrong in thee to ask for death.

"Now let me tell thee all about my little Lûlû, my treasured, guarded pet, of whom I never yet told any man. That shows how much I love thee. By the Prophet, when the war is ended, thou shalt come to El Mansûreh, and feast with me a month —a year! I will buy for thee another Lûlû. O my soul! O night! There is none like her— a titbit, a delicacy, I do assure thee!"

And he expatiated, for the fortieth time, upon the merits of his newest love, a Circassian child whom he had purchased at an extravagant price just before the martial fury seized him. He described the charms of her in terms so violent that Mabrûk, though shocked by their indelicacy, was deeply moved. He also hugged himself and sighed consumedly. Long after they had both lain down to sleep, and while the lusty black was snoring loudly, he stared through the tent-mouth at the throbbing stars, and thought on Zeynab with distress of longing.

CHAPTER XXXVI

He woke with a start to see the selfsame stars. Bugles were sounding the alarm; the camp was stirring. He roused Murad Bey, who rubbed his eyes and yawned and grumbled as he got up. Both armed themselves and hastened forth. At that minute the cannon roared from the Egyptian batteries.

The scene was wild confusion. Trumpets shrilled, drums beat deliriously; orderlies galloped to and fro, cursing and shouting, stupefying the crowds of sleepy men, whose first requirement was to know precisely what had happened. From the tents of the Arabs close at hand came notes of a war-song, mingled with fierce cries. The whiteness of first dawn was in the air.

The men of the regiment assembled as fast as they could. They knew their business, and the higher officers did no good by shouting at them and beating them with the flat of their swords.

"There is no such hurry!" cried out Murad Bey, who felt sleepy and irritable. "Our gunners will keep them off—please God, destroy them."

For answer he received a slap in the face from the commanding officer. At the same instant the

cannonade ceased suddenly, leaving a floating rumour in men's ears which troubled hearing. A mounted aide-de-camp careering by cried: "Haste, haste! Form up! Prepare to meet the charge! Our cannon fired too far. The sight was wrong. They storm the outworks. Iblîs himself must be their leader to guide them through the desert in the dark. Stand firm, and fear not!" The last words were drowned in the distance.

The stars were gone by now, and there was light to see by. The crackle of the volleys sounded near at hand; then that sound ceased, and Mabrûk could hear the shouts and cries of men at the death-grapple. It was clear that the English were among them, on the summit of the great mound, charging at the point of the bayonet. Mabrûk clenched his teeth, and became stone in the strength of his determination not to turn and flee. Murad Bey, at his side, was sobbing like a baby. The first sunlight smote them.

All at once, he knew not how, the battle was upon them. A horde of red-faced men, all fierce with victory, assailed the waiting ranks of true believers. Those in front made stout resistance, but were fast cut down, seeing which the men behind in frenzy broke the ranks to run and help them. In a trice the heathen warriors were among them, through them. Mabrûk beheld their set red faces, heard them mutter as they thrust and thrust again. He saw Murad Bey transfixed and falling, with head and arms flung back, his eyes turned over, and slashed at his murderer with all his might. But at that moment he was

himself assailed with fury, and, seeing all men running, turned and fled. He knew that he was wounded in the thigh, but felt no pain.

The flight was a grim battle in itself; for those on horseback trampled those on foot, the strong oppressed the weak, each struggling for himself with hate for others. Mabrûk, quite helpless in the tide, was carried down the slopes to the canal, into which hundreds plunged, and swam across or drowned, as Allah willed it. The rush was for the narrow bridge, where hundreds more were pushed into the stream. Shells from the great mound, now occupied by the English, fell to right and left, before and behind, and burst upon the ground, but not one, by High Mercy, struck that struggling mass of humanity. Mabrûk got over, holding on to a horse's tail; when, just as the throng dispersed a little, by the blessing of Allah, a bit of shell knocked off half of the rider's head, and he fell from the saddle. Quick as thought Mabrûk replaced him, and clapped heels to the horse's flanks, yelling praise to Allah. Away he sped like the wind, overthrowing all in his way, down the valley towards the broad green rif. The face which Murad Bey had made at dying was still before him, causing him to laugh, he knew not why. Then the glamour of the early sunlight pleased him; he watched the movements of his horse's shadow with strange glee. In passing some tiny fields fenced off with reeds, he caught himself praising Allah, who had assigned to each small plot its true proprietor. His mind amused itself without his will.

The village of Abu Hammâd was left behind; groups of horsemen were overtaken, passed and distanced. At length Mabrûk came up with a pair of riders, high officers by their appearance, whose tired steeds took pace from his and stretched their gallop. Their aim, he learnt from occasional exclamations, was to join Arâbi, who was somewhere ahead of them with the Sheykh Abdullah Nadîm. They were now on a bank between tilled fields. Before them, in the distance, buildings, mud-coloured or whitewashed, of the town of Zacâzîc were seen among palm-trees.

"In sh' Allah, we may yet find a train at the station yonder," panted one of Mabrûk's chance companions, a very fat man, on the verge of apoplexy.

"In sh' Allah!" echoed Mabrûk and the other huskily. Their throats and mouths and lips were parched with drought, with sand, and with the taste of gunpowder.

But the railway-station at Zacâzîc was all shut up. Some loiterers told them that the staff had fled. At that the two superiors resumed their ride. But Mabrûk could no longer vie with them. At pulling up his brain had reeled, and he now caught his body falling forward, backward, sideways, and prevented it only by repeated efforts. He had noticed nothing in the excitement of the gallop; but now he was conscious of the loss of blood from his wound. He asked for water of the little crowd of fellahîn, and it presently was brought to him in the name of Allah. The man who held the pitcher up to him said that a train had gone through, a few minutes

before, from Abu Hammâd, an Egyptian officer standing over the engine-driver with drawn sword, in whom the speaker vowed he had recognized Ahmed Pasha Arâbi.

By that time other fugitives began to arrive; Mabrûk feared to lose his horse, if they but guessed how weak he was. So he rode on slowly with as lively an air as he could muster. Trees, houses, passed him by like shapes of cloud; the steady glide of water beneath a bridge seemed his own life ebbing from him. He had a vague idea of going to some mosque to die in sanctuary, yet knew that it would not be wise to linger in the town. Instinct prompted him to turn aside from the main line of flight, and, having left the town behind and feeling finished, he looked for the first village, and rode blindly towards it. The hour was still early. All the people were at work in the fields. The narrow way between the houses seemed deserted. His feeble cries for help met no response. Arrived at his last gasp, he got down off his horse, and reeled, and fell.

In a trice the empty place seemed full of people. He heard a man say: "There is neither Power nor Might save in Allah the Tremendous!" and a woman cry: "Our Lord have mercy on him!" and thereby knew that he was either dead or dying.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Mabrûk awoke to find himself upon a couch in a room such as that in which he had been born—a mud-built inner room, with an oven at one end. Around him were kind faces of the fellahîn.

"The praise to Allah!" "He wakes up; he is alive!" "May Allah heal and strengthen him!" "Our Lord preserve thee, O Physician of the Age!" came their cries in concert, as his eyes unclosed. And one, who sat beside his bed, whose mouse-coloured face, thin beard, and almond eyes proclaimed the native of Hind, praised Allah likewise.

The daylight, seen through door and window, possessed the deep blue tone of shadowed ways at sunset. The noise that stole in with it was the sigh of evening. A woman brought the sufferer a bowl of milk, whereof he drank and felt refreshed. The Hindi at his side, who was no other than a physician, renewed the dressing of his wound with muttered spells; then bade him sleep.

Sleep seemed to emanate from the bright almond eyes of the man of healing, fixed upon the patient while he told his beads. Mabrûk sank back at once with conscious ease.

He awoke a second time to find it night. A wick burning in a saucer of oil and water upon the floor gave light to the humble room, showing the lord of the house and his wife asleep on one side, and the physician dozing where he sat cross-legged, still holding his rosary, backed by a laughing shadow on the wall. He woke as Mabrûk sat up.

"Have no fear, O my son! Sleep on," he said. "By Allah, it is lucky I was passing through this place and saw the concourse. It pleases me to think my skill has served thee. Since the springtime of the year I have been in this land of evil, travelling with choice drugs for sale. Twice have I been robbed and beaten in these last two months. Your Arâbi Basha was no ruler; the land is left without a Government. By the Corân, I am glad that the Inklîz—curse their religion!—have devoured him quite. The land is no longer any place for trade; the inhabitants go in fear, every man armed to the teeth, and hide their money. Fain would I win to Suez, but I feared to pass near the contending hosts."

"May Allah Most High reward thy kindness to me! Behold me healed, thanks to thy science under Allah. Now I would go my way, for I fear to be overtaken and made prisoner."

"Have no fear, I tell thee. A part of the army of the Inklîz is already far beyond us towards the capital. The rest are quiet near the battlefield. Ah! they fooled Arâbi perfectly. He did not know their tricks; they marched by compass, and so traversed in the dark a waste pathless by day-

light. I know them and their ways. I have lived with them; and I tell thee, have no fear. They are fools in victory, never pressing their advantage; though in defeat and difficulty they become true devils. Their intelligence in common things is that of oxen; a child in guile can lead them by the nose. Like oxen, moreover, they eat not the food of men. If an ox ate man's food it would fall sick and die. It is the same with the Inklîz. O Lord of the Worlds, what strange and various beasts Thou hast created! Lie still, I say, and sleep thy fill till morning."

But Mabrûk was become, on a sudden, deadly home-sick. He longed to see once more the mighty Nile, and that little tuft of palm-trees near its bank which sprang from out the hovels of his native village. Feeling strong again, he rose, and pressed a gift of money on that kind physician, saying:

"Allah knows it is too little, yet it is all I have."

The Hindi, after many protestations of disinterestedness, was about to accept the present, when the master of the house, awakened by their argument, sprang up and forbade him with indignation.

"I ask forgiveness of Allah, who sent to us a guest in need. Nay, all the charges are upon my head. Keep the money, O my son, for thy further journey. It is far to where thou sayest, and thou wilt need refreshment at least, if not a lodging ere thou comest thither. In sh' Allah, now that the Inklîz have won, things will be settled, and

the land will prosper. Praise be to Allah! It is known that they respect men's property. Hereafter, in better days, speak of payment. Ah! often, often have we cursed you soldiers, when you drove our cattle and devoured our corn; but now, in your fall, all Muslimîn are brothers. The punishment of the Inklîz upon our land has yet to be felt before we talk of peace."

"They are mad. There will be no punishment," said the Hindi; and he spat upon the ground. "I have lived with them, and know their ways. They are mild when men expect severity, and would call it just; and fierce for nothing when the times are quiet."

"By the Prophet, they are lords of mercy!" Mabrûk agreed, and he related how their gunners had refrained from striking with their shells the dense crowd on the bridge.

"The praise to Allah, then, if that is so," exclaimed the master of the house, with deep-breathed fervour; "for they are now our lords. In sooth, it matters not to quiet folk who rules in Masr, so only that he be less harsh than was Arâbi, and give us rest to live and die in peace."

With that, seeing that Mabrûk was anxious to be going, he brought forth his horse from an adjoining room, and having adjusted the saddle and bridle, led it forth into the starlight.

"It is yet but the fourth hour of the night," he said. "Ride slowly, lest thy wound break out afresh. Thou art weak; it is natural. I pray thee nurse thy strength. By the Prophet, thou

art over-bold to ride alone by night! Best wait till morning. . . . Well, thy way lies yonder."

The stars alone seemed wakeful, giving light enough to see by; but as Mabrûk rode off, his horse's hoof-beats roused all the dogs at hand to sudden fury.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The barking of the dogs ceased gradually as the village was left behind. The horse, being rested and well fed, was fresh at first, and danced at every shadow. At one point, passing near a hamlet buried under palm-trees, a rush of snarling dogs amid the shadows maddened the poor beast. When, upon that, a ghafîr stood forth and called upon the horseman to attest the Unity, Mabrûk could no longer hold him, but was carried onward at a fearful pace, expecting every minute to be dashed to pieces. After that breakneck rush, the horse was quiet, and Mabrûk could let his mind rove where it listed.

The stars gazed down upon the face of earth, of which the main features only were discerned as through a veil. The cotton-fields on either hand were lost in gloom, while trees and the lump of villages loomed forth mysterious. Peace was on all the scene, a peace which seemed the natural garb of earth, the guerdon of her faithful sons who till the soil. The chant of a village watchman, musical in the distance: "I trust in Him who sleepeth not nor dieth!" seemed a cry from the whole world's heart.

What recked the fellahîn, now sleeping in these villages as natural as the plants and trees, of the loss of Tel-el-Kebîr? For them it was a strife of vain illusions, a cry of men who sought their own advancement, forgetful of the Day of Reckoning and the sovereignty of Allah Most High. To Mabrûk it now seemed all who fought had sinned. The murmur and the fragrance of the night, the steadfast stars, the fields, the quiet palm-groves, taught resignation as the only virtue.

As he rode slowly, feeling languid, his brain, through weakness, offered pictures to him. He beheld the details of the strife, its fleeting glory, and played his part again against his will. It was but weariness, a cruel mockery, from which he woke to beauties of the night with that disburdenment wherewith a man shakes off some evil dream. The horse, forgotten of his rider, paced slowly and more slowly, and at length stood still. For a while Mabrûk allowed him to remain so, the stillness allowing a respite from the crowding pictures. Inhaling solace from the peaceful night, he vowed before Allah to renounce ambition. Riding on at a foot's pace, he heard a cock crow in the distance. The call was answered in the nearer villages, till, with the concert near and far, there seemed a wailing of the whole horizon.

Presently the sky grew pale behind him, recalling that dawn of horror yesterday upon the great mound. It seemed that he had always shuddered at this hour; now he would dread it tenfold till his dying day. The first awakened birds began to pipe uncertainly. He could now tell the

colours of the landscape. The whiteness of a minaret amid a grove of trees suggested green in the surrounding foliage. Soon from its height went forth the call to prayer. He could just discern the figure of the singer standing in the little gallery with hands crossed on his breast. Soon the whole world blushed, and he met peasants, men and women, going forth to work, with eyes screwed up against the sun's first rays. Some of these stopped to talk of the defeat. They were sorry, they protested, out of mere politeness, for it was evident from their smiles and hearty tone that they were glad.

At length Mabrûk began to recognize surrounding objects. The pigeon-towers of a village in the distance were familiar. He urged his horse a little, and about the third hour after sunrise reached the bank. A long way off, upon the further shore, he saw his village with its pluming palm-trees, and beyond it the two bridges. There was still far to go, and he was nearly spent. But a piece of water-melon, held out to him with a smile by a passing woman, refreshed him somewhat, and at length his horse's hoof-beats rang out on the bridge. It was then the hottest of the day, when men seek shelter; yet on the further bank, just past the railway, he came upon a group of men encamped beside it in the sun's full blaze. They were folk of his own village, and his father was among them.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"But what make you here?" was Mabrûk's first question, when all had thanked the Protector for his safe return.

"Wallahi, we await the Inklîz," said his father gravely. "Those misbegotten sons of fury—which means Arâbi's men—flying from Allah knows where, had sought to ruin us. The last trainful of them stopped just here before the bridge; and its inhabitants, pouring forth—the shameless devils!—cut down our reeds and shrubs, and lighted a great fire beneath the bridge there, to destroy it. Look yonder, where the piers are blackened. Then—f- - rrrt!—they blew their horn and off they went, careless of us poor righteous men, whom they had ruined. For what would happen then, inevitably? When the Inklîz arrived, and found the bridge made useless, they would lay waste the nearest village, and me, the omdeh, they would flog, and likely kill! What cared those sons of darkness? But, praise be to Allah, we have stopped their wickedness. The fire was a very great one; but we toiled with our nabbûts for hours, singeing our beards, our clothing, and at length, by the boundless mercy

of the Powerful, we put it out. There remains not one live ember. And now, all this night and morning, we have sat here waiting to tell the Inklîz what service we have done. But go thou on to the house, where thy mother and thy wife are mourning for thee. Heardst thou aught of thy brother Rashîd? I greatly fear that he is dead, the poor one. Our Lord have mercy on him! . . . That is a fine horse thou ridest. It is well seen thou hast been where honours shower. But on to the house and rest, for thou art weary."

Mabrûk rode on, as he was bidden, and was soon weeping with the women in the rapture of home-coming. He tasted food, and then lay down and slept.

About the fourth hour after noon, when he lay awake and talking with Zeynab, one came hot-foot to relate that the Inklîz had come at last. Their train had stopped before the bridge, and some of their great ones had stepped forth, but would not listen to the villagers, but talked among themselves in a strange jargon. They seemed in need of something, though what they could not explain, Allah having put the seal of infidelity upon their tongues. The Sheykh Mustafa had thought of his son Mabrûk for an interpreter, and had forthwith dispatched this runner.

Mabrûk ran forth at once beside the messenger.

From the window of every compartment of a long train, drawn up on the embankment short of the bridge, naked heads leaned forth, and broad, red faces with pale, vacant eyes and

spreading noses. Shouts and loud laughter, with snatches of untuneful song, were in the air. "Strange lords that Allah sends us!" gasped the lad at Mabrûk's side.

A group of high officers were down on the ground, talking among themselves in some perplexity; while the Sheykh Mustafa and his villagers pressed round them obsequiously, trying to tell the service they had rendered, but were driven off from time to time with blows and angry words.

"Allah is bountiful, O my eyes!" whispered the omdeh to his son, as he thrust him forward. "They are all drunk. A thing to be recorded in books."

An officer finding Mabrûk come close to him, turned sharply round, making as if to strike out with his cane. But the anger faded from his face; he grinned agreeably. Mabrûk then, with horror, remembered he was still in uniform. He had small doubt but they would seize and hang him. Trembling in every limb, he made low reverence, and said, in the English tongue: "Your will, O mister?"

At that the officers gathered round him, seeming much relieved. It was clear that they had no intent to hang him. The chief among them made him understand that they had expected the station-master from the town across the bridge to meet them at this point. He had been ordered to do so by telegraph from Tanta. Why was he not there?

"He come now directly; see," said Mabrûk,

and pointed towards the other bridge, from which, along the Nile bank, a small procession of great ones in all the glory of frock-coats and fezes, kid gloves and white parasols, mounted upon asses and with pedestrian attendants, was approaching with a haste undignified.

The English officers begged Mabrûk to stand by them and interpret. They had had a dragoman assigned to them, but he proved a rascal, and had run away. Could he spare the time to journey with them to the capital?

"With pleasure, sir," replied Mabrûk, much gratified.

The small procession now came hurrying up, mopping hot faces, asking Allah's pardon. Beside the station-master and his staff, there were the mudîr, the sub-mudîr, and the câdi, with attendants. The governor began a fine speech in the French language.

"What does he say?" asked the officers.

"He say you honour us; you very welcome to our batrie, misters."

"Call the station-master," said the leader of the English, though His Excellency's speech was far from finished.

Mabrûk was pleasantly impressed by this high arrogance addressed to all save himself, and when the officer bade him tell the station-master to come with them across the bridge, as a mere formality, he took his tone from it, and said disdainfully:

"Get on to the train, O thou, and if anything goes wrong they shoot thee dead."

The quaking wretch obeyed in abject terror.

Mabrûk informed his father of the honour done to him, and then, at a call from the officers, entered their compartment.

"Blest art thou, O Mabruk!" shouted the villagers, as the train moved off, leaving the mudîr and other great ones sore discomfited. "Speak for us, mention us, O thou high-preferred one! Forget not thine old friends, thy father's house."

CHAPTER XL

Mabrûk's high preferment was of short duration. The great ones of the English showed him favour on the journey, making it pass too quickly, like a blissful dream. They received unquestioningly the tale of grievous sickness, condemning him to lie still and groan while men were fighting, which he devised to soothe them, lest, taking him for an active enemy, they might be moved to hang him. But, on arrival at the city, they conferred together in whispers, and then, with some embarrassment, offered to defray the cost of his return journey.

"Oh no, sirs! I beseech you, think not of it!" he replied with dignity, cut to the very soul by that abrupt dismissal. Already he had seen himself at the right hand of Power, guiding that hand alike in pardon and revenge.

To add to his discomfiture, he had no sooner gone outside the railway-station than he remembered that he had brought no money with him. There was nothing for it but to walk to the house of 'Ala'd-dîn, where he had formed the purpose to offer himself as a guest for the night. The way was long, and, what with the fatigue and

chagrin and his late excitement, his wound broke out afresh, giving him pain at every step.

The streets appeared more animated than ever he remembered to have seen them. Every way was thronged with happy, smiling people. He felt alone in suffering, as he dragged his limbs, half-dead, among them.

Within sight of his destination, he could go no farther, so sat down against a wall and prayed for strength. The tops of the houses opposite were flushed with sunset. Their warmth seemed high above him, floating like a cloud in air.

In that place and position the sweetmeat-seller returning from his rounds found him quite insensible. Weeping, he carried him to the house, and laid him on his own bed, then ran for a physician. The man he sought was out, but one who lodged with him, at mention of an officer of the insurgent army, threw down the book he was reading, and questioned the sobbing messenger.

"I too am a hakîm," he said. "Wait but a minute and I go with thee." He then assumed a pair of huge horn spectacles, which made his aspect that of an afrît, sought out his case of implements, and went out with 'Ala'd-dîn.

It proved to be the same good man whom Mabrûk had aided in his business at the bombardment of Fort Adda. He lavished all his skill upon so dear a patient, even removing to the same house, a mean one, though verily he cared not how obscure his dwelling, for, as his spectacles proclaimed, he was in hiding. With many others of Arâbi's friends, he feared the ven-

geance of the English; and shuddered at the rashness of Mabrûk, who had come to this house through crowded streets, denounced for all men by the accursed uniform.

"But he was ever a bold youth—a perfect dare-devil!" he said to 'Ala'd-dîn, as they two sat beside the unconscious sufferer. "I mind me, in the great bombardment, how he showed his whole form carelessly in an embrasure when the ships were killing us."

"Ay," rejoined the sweetmeat-seller, with a smile of sad remembrance, "thou sayest truth, by Allah! He was ever the son of manliness. When a mere lad he made friends with the most desperate, and performed deeds which quiet men scarce dare to think on. In his life he was the bravest man I ever knew, and withal a lord of generosity. All I possess is owing to his kindness. May Allah pardon and have mercy on him!"

"He is not yet dead, in sh' Allah!" replied the sage, more cheerfully. "Go now and fetch the potion which I ordered."

For long the sick man hovered between life and death. His wife and child were summoned to be near him, and neighbours, moved by the sad case of one so young, came in to scan his face and sigh and moan. The room was often full to overflowing, to the joy of 'Ala'd-dîn, who thought so many prayers and heartfelt blessings would do much more than medicine for his friend's repair.

When at last the patient gathered strength enough to stir abroad, it was known that the English were good, harmless people, who waived

their right to take the province for themselves, and would not allow the Turks to punish more than the few chief movers in rebellion. Loud were the praises of their generosity. The English manners, English speech, were in the air. Young men of fashion who used to say "Banjû" in the French way, now said "Good-ah-day" at sight of one another. English civilization was the rage, and all the youth of the city flocked to the taverns of the Frankish quarter in order to study the right way of it.

Mabrûk's physician discarded his horn spectacles, and went about his business unafraid. He had applied for medical employment in the new army which the English were to frame for the Khedive, and had spoken also for his patient as a zealous officer. To conform in all respects to English ways was now his whole desire, both for himself and his friend; and on the first day when Mabrûk seemed well enough he took him in a carriage to a certain coffee-house beside the most crowded street in the foreign quarter.

The invalid gazed round him with intense delight. The whole street rippled in blue sunlight. Grand carriages passed by with prancing horses; amid the moving, laughing crowd of many colours were Frankish ladies of surpassing beauty; their forms were as soft music to his soul. He thought on that sweet story which had charmed his youth—the Frankish love-tale of Kamîl and Sharlas—and dreamed voluptuously.

The talk around them at the tables was all of the Inklîz and their good deeds; and when

any of that race passed by upon the pavement, they were hailed with waving hands and cordial blessings.

Mabrûk was, for the time, all eyes. He espied objects of interest afar off, and pointed them out to his companion. A group of elderly fellahîn making their way along the pavement in extreme bewilderment, staring at all they met, with open mouths, absorbed his gaze and the doctor's at the same time. Both watched them, laughing, when, as they drew near, Mabrûk leapt up from his seat, and cried: "My father!"

The old man peered about him, stupefied, till, catching sight of his son, he too cried out in joy. They fell on each other's neck and wept a little, while the doctor had the presence of mind to call a waiter and command for every sheykh a shîsheh and a cup of coffee. All in time found seats, and praised the benefactor.

"Now, O my father, say what brings thee here?" exclaimed Mabrûk when raptures had subsided.

"A noble business, O my son! Know that I and all these others—honourable men, none like them, men of substance—are no less than members of a deputation from all the omdehs of the seaward provinces, who have this morning waited upon His Excellency Riâz Basha at the Ministry of the Interior, craving leave to present to the illustrious and grand ginrâl, the victorious Sîr Wûlsli, and also to the noble and disinterested Amîrâl Sîmûr, a panoply of arms and accoutrements worthy of such mighty conquerors, in thanksgiving for their manifold mercies towards this land of Masr. By

Allah! they might well have taken all the country for themselves, the dear ones; but they give us back our darling Efendîna. It is said that they will even save from death that wicked rebel, the depraved Arâbi, who led us wrong, and brought such grief upon us, causing thee to be wounded near to death and thy brother Rashîd to be made a prisoner. What sin to fight against these good Inklîz, who, it is well seen, are the lords of generosity! . . . And yet I know not; for this morning I and my colleagues saw a poor man ask of some of them, and they bade him begone in a tone of cursing. The beggar could not leave them thus in anger; he craved their blessing in the place of alms, so clung to them the more with piteous cries. They turned upon him then and cursed his father, and made as if to beat him with their sticks. An ill deed, O my son! . . . And yet it is true that they are lords of kindness! So thou art about to join the fine new army which the Inklîz are forming for dear Efendîna. The praise to Allah; they are good instructors! . . . And yet I know not. Things are sadly changed. I and my colleagues have been quite bewildered. It shocks me, all this intercourse of clean with foul, these unveiled women in the streets, these heathen manners. It may be well enough, but I mislike it; it savours much of weakness in the faith. We pray such things may never reach the villages. Allah is greatest!"

Mabrûk laughed gaily at his father's doubts, looking with love upon the passing scene. He

saw a carriage holding two fine Frankish women draw up to the footwalk, and a young man of the children of the Nile shake hands with its occupants. Surely the days of perfect civilization—the days of Sharlas and Kamîl—had come at last.

THE END

BILLING AND SONS, LTD., PRINTERS, GUILDFORD

PR
6031
I35
C4

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Barbara

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW.

FAC. NOV 15 1971 J

OCT 1 0 1983

RETURNED OCT 20 1983

RETD OCT 20 1983 3

Series 9482

3 1205 00557 4890

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A A 001 428 968 0